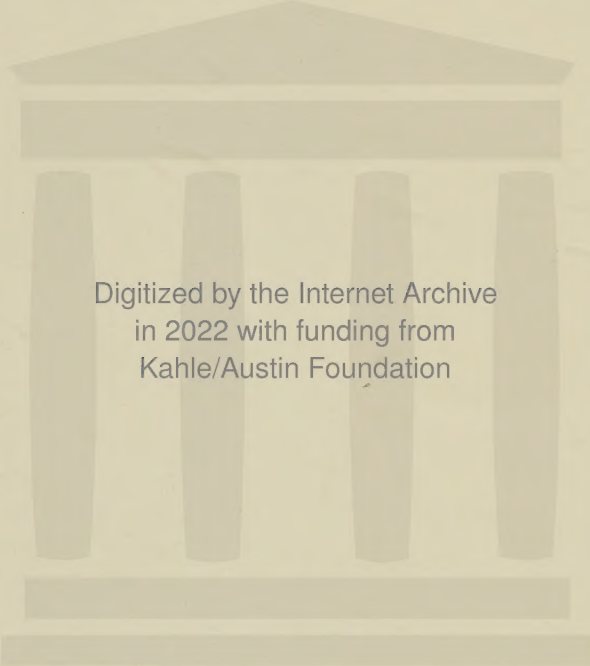


HILLS THAT BRING PEACE

REV. C. D. BELL, M. A.





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HILLS THAT BRING PEACE.

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HILLS THAT BRING PEACE.

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BY THE

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TO THE READER.



THE following chapters were preached as sermons on week evenings to my stated congregation. As the Author has reason to believe they were listened to by many with interest, he is in hopes they may be read by many more with profit. For the description of the localities of the various mountains he is indebted to Stanley's "Sinai and Palestine," and to the writers in Smith's "Dictionary of the Bible."

The little book is commended to the blessing of Him "without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy."

CHELTENHAM, *May* 1874.

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INTRODUCTORY.

I.

INTRODUCTORY.

“The mountains shall bring peace to the people, and the little hills,
by righteousness.”—PSALM lxxii. 3.

THE Holy Land, the land of wonders, must ever possess a deep interest for every Christian mind. Indeed no one, be he scholar or antiquary, artist or poet, can hear the name “Palestine” without having some chord in his heart touched as the country and its associations rise up before his eye. For Palestine was the cradle of our race. Here Adam was created; here lived the fathers of mankind; here prophets spoke; here angels walked; and here the voice of God was heard giving utterance to the laws of eternal truth and justice.

It was the scene of many a miracle, the theatre of events which alike awe the mind and enthral the imagination. Here, too, the Son of God and the Saviour of men became incarnate. The Word

made flesh trod its dusty roads, dwelt in its towns, taught on its hill-sides, wandered by the shores of its lakes or by the margin of its rivers, spoke in its temple, preached in its synagogues, and died in its chief city as a sacrifice for sin.

There is not a spot in the Holy Land which has not a matchless and undying interest from the personal story of God manifest in flesh, of Him who hallowed every step of its ground by His wondrous life and His atoning death. Though its place on the map of the world is but inconsiderable, "being a strip of country about the size of Wales, less than 140 miles in length, and barely 40 in average breadth, hemmed in between the Mediterranean Sea on the one hand, and the enormous trench of the Jordan valley on the other," yet from its remarkable position "on the extremest western edge of the East," it has always exercised an important influence over both the great eastern and western empires. Assyria and Egypt are intimately connected with its history. Greece felt the power of its wondrous spell; and Rome reduced Judea into a tributary province, and made it an appendage of the Cæsars. The Holy Land was the battlefield in successive ages

of the hostile powers who contended for the empire of the East. The crescent of Mohammed floated in triumph over the walls of Jerusalem, and the cross of the Crusaders was borne here on the banners of the Christian kings who leagued themselves together, in order to rescue the Holy City out of the hand of the infidel. Here, too, came the armies of that Napoleon whose burning and boundless ambition would have grasped two hemispheres, and who sought to unite under one splendid monarchy the kingdoms of the eastern and western world. No country is so full of thrilling memories, nor can any be so well described as "haunted ground." And if, as Dr Johnson has said, "the man is little to be envied whose patriotism would not gain force upon the plains of Marathon, or whose feelings would not grow warmer among the ruins of Iona," surely he is less to be envied who can think with an unmoved heart or an unmoistened eye upon

"Those holy fields,
Over whose acres walked those blessed feet
Which eighteen hundred years ago were nailed
For our advantage on the bitter cross."

Palestine contains every variety of scenery which can please or charm the eye. There is the swell-

ing range of Lebanon, whose heights are crowned with glittering snows, and whose sides are girdled by the stately cedar. There is the deep valley of the Jordan, through which rushes the one river of Judea to its grave in the Dead Sea. There is the Lake of Galilee, with its blue waters, cradled amongst the hills; and there is Hermon glittering with snows, and Eshcol purple with the vintage of grapes, and Sharon blushing with roses, and Gilead renowned for its balm, and the long ridge of Carmel rising from the plain, and running close to the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. All these scenes, and many more, are full of associations dear to the Christian's heart, and are bound up with his most solemn recollections and his brightest hopes. Since this is the case, and believing that "all Scripture is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness," I have chosen as the subject for our successive consideration the mountains of the Bible, hoping that the theme may prove both interesting and attractive. On these mountains events have happened, and oracles have been uttered, which will furnish lessons of wisdom and instruction to the Church till the end of time—till

“the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed,” and the heavens and the earth be rolled together as a scroll. May God bless this attempt to unfold His Word! May He, by the Holy Spirit, teach us to understand in a spiritual sense, as we tread the sacred heights of Palestine, the full meaning of the Psalmist’s words—“The mountains shall bring peace to the people, and the little hills, by righteousness!”

The present lecture shall be entirely of an introductory character. In those that are to follow, I shall lead you to the several mountains which are of peculiar interest, because of the events with which they are associated, and shall consider the several lessons which these events teach us.

Palestine has been described as essentially a mountainous country; not that it contains independent chains, as in Greece, for example, but because every part of the high land is in greater or less undulations. But it is not only a mountainous district. “The mass of hills which occupies the centre of the country is bordered and framed on both sides, east and west, by a broad belt of low land, sunk deep below its own level.

The slopes or cliffs which form, as it were, the retaining walls of this depression, are furrowed and cleft by the torrent beds which discharge the waters of the hills, and form the means of communication between the upper and lower level." This mountainous character of the land explains the reason why so much of the imagery of the Bible is taken from the hills. Thus, "the mountains" are represented as "breaking forth into singing" at the redemption of Israel; as "dropping sweet wine" when the captivity of the people is at an end. We read of "the mountains being melted," "made desolate," "threshed and beaten small," "weighed in scales," "trembling," and "being removed." In order to get some spiritual profit and comfort from the subject before us, I shall now take up one or two passages in which "the mountains" are figuratively used, and connected with God's promises to His people.

Look, for instance, at the sixth verse of the 36th Psalm—"Thy righteousness is like the great mountains, Thy judgments are a great deep." In this psalm David has been drawing a striking picture of a wicked man, who abandons himself, without check or remorse, to the imaginations of

his own evil heart. "The transgression of the wicked saith within my heart, that there is no fear of God before his eyes. For he flattereth himself in his own eyes, until his iniquity be found to be hateful. The words of his mouth are iniquity and deceit: he hath left off to be wise and to do good. He deviseth mischief upon his bed; he setteth himself in a way that is not good; he abhorreth not evil." In such dark colours does the Psalmist paint the character of an ungodly man. And now, as if terrified with the picture which he has drawn of secure and premeditated wickedness, he, with a quick revulsion of feeling, turns to Him whose loving-kindness and truth are at all times a sure defence—"Thy mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens, and Thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds. Thy righteousness is like the great mountains, and Thy judgments are a great deep." The ways of God may be in the deep waters, and His footsteps may not be known; clouds and darkness may be round about Him, and we may not be able to trace the reason of His workings: but we may rest assured that "the Judge of all the earth doeth right."

"God moves in a mysterious way,
His wonders to perform,"

and the divine dealings are often inscrutable. There is much that is mysterious in His providence. We cannot tell the reason of this appointment or of that dispensation; why some wicked man should flourish like a green bay-tree, while some righteous man is tried by poverty, or is visited by repeated afflictions. "His judgments are a great deep." The vast ocean cannot be fathomed by any human line. What of that? "His righteousness is like the great mountains," standing out bold and prominent from the unfathomable waters, and visible to all around. Whatever be the darkness of the waters, the everlasting hills that rise out of them, and gird them round on every side, are bright with the sunshine of the divine love. "The Lord is righteous in all His ways, and holy in all His works." His righteousness, like the great mountains, cannot be removed or displaced, it is unmovable; and we can take our stand upon it, and look out thence over the sea of His providence, and, however unquiet or troubled it may appear, can rest in the assurance that "He doeth all things well." If I know that the righteousness of God is as strong and stable and conspicuous as the everlasting hills,

what to me are the tossings and tumults of human affairs? Has He not “given to the sea its bounds, which it cannot pass?” Has He not said, “So far shalt thou come, and no further?” Therefore all must be well. The boundaries which His providence has appointed can never be broken down.

Brethren, is there not consolation in this thought? You may be at this time the subject of what is called a mysterious dispensation. You cannot understand why God is dealing with you as He is: you are disheartened by what is obscure, nor can you see the fitness and goodness of His appointments. Be it so that all is dark, and that His judgments are a great deep; still it is your privilege to “look,” as David says, “to the hills, from whence cometh your help,” and to believe that whatsoever God does is the best that could be done, the very thing you would wish to be done could you see as He does, and were all His reasons laid open to your view. Whilst, therefore, there is much that is inexplicable in His providence, much of which you cannot discern the cause or explain the reason—in spite of all, hold fast by your confidence in His loving-kindness and truth,

and trust Him even as the Psalmist did when he exclaimed, "Thy righteousness is like the great mountains; Thy judgments are a great deep."

Again, take a figure of the security of God's people from the mountains. Thus we read in Ps. cxxv. 2, "As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about His people from henceforth, even for ever." Now though this imagery is not literally realised, as we might expect it to be, Jerusalem not being enclosed by a continuous circle of mountains; yet still the girdle of hills which rise near, and especially on the north-east and south-east, act as a natural bulwark against enemies. These must be surmounted before the traveller can see or the invader attack the Holy City. So "the Lord is round about His people." "Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls; for I," saith Jehovah, "will be unto her a wall of fire round about." God is the protection of His people. "His angel encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them." How safe they must be! What enemy can assail them without His permission, or what trouble reach them without His appointment? And "who is he," or what is he, "that can harm

you, if ye be followers of that which is good?" Foes may attack you, but you shall be "made more than conqueror" over them, "through Him that hath loved you." Trials may disturb you, but they shall purify whilst they pain, and "the light affliction which is but for a moment shall work for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." God will take your cause into His own hands, will ward off all real harm, and protect you from all real danger. On His word you may lean; in His promises you may confide. Your good and God's glory ever move in the same direction, they are bound up one with the other; and whatever your circumstances, trials, cares, or griefs, this assurance fits them—"As thy days, so shall thy strength be." You have sufferings to pass through, corruptions to subdue, difficulties to contend with; yet nothing being impossible, nay, not even difficult, to Omnipotence, be assured that in your battle and watch and work you shall find the promise true—"My grace is sufficient for thee, my strength is made perfect in weakness." "Then be strong, and of a good courage." The experience of all believers assures us that "it is better to trust in the Lord,

than to put confidence in man; it is better to trust in the Lord, than to put any confidence in princes.” “They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed.” “As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so is the Lord round about His people from henceforth, even for ever.”

Or take one more comforting image from the mountains: Isa. liv. 10—“For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee.”

This promise reminds us of our Lord’s own words—“Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.” The most stable things in the outward world are not so stable as God’s covenant of grace. Here we are assured by the very boldest figures that the lofty hills shall sooner be levelled with the plain, or be buried fathoms deep beneath the waves—that the stars shall sooner fall, and the sun be blotted from the sky, than any promise in God’s Word fail of its fulfilment.

Blessed be God for this blessed truth! “It is an

anchor for the soul, sure and steadfast." It is a pillow on which the weary head may rest secure. All things are changing around us, all things animate and inanimate; the form and features of this great world are constantly altering; we ourselves "never continue in one stay," and therefore it sustains the heart to know that with the God of salvation is "no variableness, neither shadow of turning." He says, and He alone can say, "I am the Lord, I change not;" so that when speaking of Him, we may use the words of Balaam—"He is not a man that He should lie, or the Son of man that He should repent. Hath He said, and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?"

Brethren, you may trust in Him. "He is faithful, and cannot deny Himself;" He "is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." His compassions fail not, and His mercy endureth for ever. Others may deceive you, He never can; others may disappoint you, He never will. Your mother may forget you; the wife of your bosom may forsake you; lovers and friends and acquaintance may cast you off; wealth may leave you, and health desert you; but He—He will never

leave you or forsake you. Many thousands on earth, and a countless multitude in heaven, can bear their testimony that "all His promises are yea and are amen in Christ Jesus to the glory of God."

He has ever been to His saints "a very present help in trouble," and through His aid they have "quenched the violence of fire," and "stopped the mouths of lions," and trodden the old serpent in the dust, and gained the victory over death, and, greatest triumph of all, confronted and conquered both the frowns and flatteries of the world.

What He was to them He will be to you, if you trust in that grace which is sufficient for you, and in that strength which is made perfect in your weakness. "Behold the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save, neither His ear heavy that it cannot hear." "Cast your burden on the Lord, and He will sustain you." "He will perfect that which concerneth you," and one day "bring forth the headstone with shoutings of Grace—grace unto it." He will do this; for does not the apostle say, when speaking of that linked and golden chain which binds the believer to the heart and throne of God, "Whom He did fore-

know He also did predestinate; and whom He did predestinate them He also called; and whom He called them He also justified; and whom He justified them He also glorified." With these words ringing in your ears, and making music in your hearts, I may conclude this lecture; for they are but a New Testament way of declaring the Old Testament truth, "The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee."

So far, then, for the present; on future occasions we shall visit Ararat, on whose snow-crowned summit the ark rested, when, in sad and solitary majesty, it rode sublime, the only moving and living thing over the boundless ocean of death. We shall ascend Moriah with Abraham, the father of the faithful and the friend of God, when he went thither at the command of Jehovah to sacrifice his son, and when "he saw Christ's day afar off, and seeing it, was glad." We shall climb the heights of Horeb, where Moses saw the bush that burned and was not consumed, and where he was appointed to be the leader and the law-giver

of the Hebrew nation. We shall tread the summit of Sinai, where, amid the terrors of the lightning-flame, and the crash of the thunder-peal—where, amid clouds and darkness, and the sound of a trumpet long and loud, streaming through the camp and reverberated from the hills, Jehovah gave the commandments of the law. We shall ascend Mount Hor, where Aaron was unrobed of the priestly garments, that they might be placed upon his son. We shall view the land of promise from the hill of Pisgah, and witness the calm death and mysterious burial of Moses on Mount Nebo; and with David we shall lament for Saul and Jonathan on the Mountains of Gilboa, and go up to Carmel with Elijah, and see him vindicating the claims of Jehovah in the face of the false prophets of Baal, and by the mighty power of prayer binding and loosing the clouds, so that they refuse or yield their rain.

Then, passing from the old dispensation to the new, we shall ascend “the Mount of the Beatitudes” with Him who spake as never man spake before; and the Mount of the Transfiguration, where the deity, in the person of Christ, broke through the humanity, and “the face of the Son of

man did shine as the sun, and His raiment became white and glistening as the light ;” and Olivet, on whose brow Jesus wept over the coming desolation of the doomed city, and from which He went up on high, leading captivity captive ; and Calvary, where He poured forth His soul an offering for sin. We shall also ascend Mount Zion, to which the Church in privilege has already come, and where in glory the slain Lamb stands surrounded by the thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, who have been redeemed from the earth.

God grant that, as we pass from one to another of these sacred heights, Christ himself may speak to us so clearly that we may be able to say, “ The voice of my Beloved. Behold He cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills ! ” And may it in a sense—a very real sense—be true of us, “ The mountains shall bring peace to the people, and the little hills, by righteousness.”

ARARAT,
THE MOUNTAIN OF REST.

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II.

ARARAT.

“And the ark rested in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, upon the mountains of Ararat.”—GEN. viii. 4.

FIRST among the mountains of the Bible, rising from the fair and fertile plains of Armenia, and forming part of an extensive mountainous chain, in which the river Tigris has its source, appears Ararat with its two sublime peaks, named the Great and Less Ararat, about seven miles distant from each other. Travellers agree in describing Ararat, which forms the angle of this stupendous chain, as a most sublime object, filling the mind of the spectator with admiration and awe. Nor is Ararat merely the summit of an elevated ridge: it is in itself a perfect mountain, the highest of whose twin conical peaks is crowned with eternal snow. It is the gigantic corner-stone of the ranges of mountains which bound the great empires of Russia, Turkey, and Persia, and its

summit attains an elevation of 17,260 feet above the level of the sea, and about 14,000 feet above the plain of the Araxes. Morier, a French traveller, tells us that "nothing can be more beautiful than its shape, more awful than its height." Sir Robert Kerr Porter gives us this fine piece of word-painting in his description of this magnificent mountain:—"As the vale opened beneath us in our descent, my whole attention became absorbed in the view before me—a vast plain, peopled with countless villages,—the towers and spires of the churches of Eitchmai-adzen arising from amidst them,—the glittering waters of the Araxes flowing through the fresh green vale, and the subordinate range of mountains skirting the base of the awful monument of the antediluvian world: it seemed to stand a stupendous link in the history of man, uniting the two races of men before and after the Flood.

"But it was not until we had arrived upon the flat plain that I beheld Ararat in all its amplitude of grandeur. From the spot on which I stood, it appeared as if the hugest mountains of the world had been piled upon each other to form this one sublime immensity of earth and rock and snow.

The icy peaks of its double heads rose majestically into the clear and cloudless heaven,—the sun blazed bright upon them, and the reflection sent forth a dazzling radiance equal to other suns. My eye, not able to rest for any length of time upon the blending glory of its summits, wandered down the interminable sides, till I could no longer trace their vast lines in the mists of the horizon: when an inexpressible impulse, immediately carrying me upwards again, refixed my gaze on the awful glare of Ararat; and this bewildered sensibility of sight being answered by a similar feeling in the mind, for some moments I was lost in a strange suspension of the powers of thought.”

It is said that one of the most striking features of this mountain is an immense chasm, which extends nearly half-way down, and over which impends a cliff, whose enormous masses of ice are from time to time precipitated into the abyss below with a noise resembling the loudest thunder.

But it is not the grandeur of this mountain as “sole sovereign of the vale,” it sits throned among the hills—it is not its icy cliffs, or the ceaseless roar of its avalanches, which gives Ararat its undying interest. Ararat enchains our atten-

tion, because it is associated with that awful judgment when the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened, and the waters of the Flood, swelling over land and continent, rose above "all the high hills that were under the whole heaven," and swept the wide world beneath the surging waters. And as we stand at the base of this stupendous mountain, and gaze upon its summits as they tower to heaven, and are "visited all night by troops of stars," we may learn from it some lessons which may be "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."

† The historical truth of the Deluge is borne witness to in other parts of Scripture. Isaiah speaks of the Flood as "the waters of Noah." Our Lord gives it the sanction of His own high authority in the Gospels of St Matthew and St Luke. St Paul, in his Epistle to the Hebrews, alludes to Noah's "faith in preparing the ark." St Peter, in his first epistle, speaks of the long-suffering of God, which "waited in the days of Noah;" and in his second epistle he cites it as an instance of the righteous judgment of God, who spared not the old world, but saved Noah, the eighth person, bringing in the

Flood upon the world of the ungodly. "The traditions of many nations have preserved the memory of a great and destructive flood, from which but a small portion of mankind escaped."

I need not detain you on the question whether the Deluge was universal or partial. Many of the first geologists have maintained that not only is there no evidence now on the earth's surface in favour of a universal deluge, but that there is positive geological evidence against it. Nor need this trouble us. The language of the sacred text may be reconciled with the idea that the Flood extended over only a limited area of the globe. The question is not a vital one, whichever way it be decided, for the lessons are the same, whether the inhabited earth only was thus desolated by a flood, and "all flesh, all in whose nostrils was the breath of life, died," or whether the waste of waters spread themselves over the whole world.

Let us now pass on to these lessons. And the first that meets us is the Punitive justice of God.

In the sixth generation from Cain, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, there was an almost universal apostacy from God, and a wide-

spread spirit of infidelity prevailed. Men became reckless in vice and daring in crime. Everywhere there was lust and bloody violence; polygamy was common. Godless marriages were formed—a fellowship of light with darkness, a communion between righteousness and unrighteousness—“And when the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair, they took them wives of all which they chose.” The wickedness of men was so great, the corruption was so entire, that the patience of God was at length wearied out. And the Lord said, “My Spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh; yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years.”

In righteous anger He determined to bring a flood of waters upon the earth, and to destroy all flesh wherein was the breath of life from under heaven, and to sweep away the wicked from a world which they had polluted by their sins. The judgment falls in due season—the windows of heaven are opened, the fountains of the great deep are broken up, the clouds gather, the storm bursts forth, and incessant rain from above, and tremendous convulsions from beneath, swell the streams into rivers, and the rivers into lakes, and the lakes

into seas. The waters rise higher and higher. Men, appalled and terror-stricken, seek one place of refuge after another; they fly from rock to rock, from peak to peak. They climb the hills, ascend the mountain-tops; but all in vain, the avenging flood pursues them, till the swelling waves wash them from their place of safety, and drown their dying screams under the remorseless waters; for the whirling flood, sweeping along fertile valleys and over undulating plains, rises at length above the highest hills, and the head of the loftiest Alp goes down beneath the wave. And now the last cry of human agony is hushed; none have escaped, even little children, innocent themselves, suffer for their parents' sins; and far below, in the unfathomable depths, lies a guilty and buried world. What ruin is here!—the wreck of two thousand years, the pomp of its cities, its wealth and luxury, its well-cultivated fields, its vast population. These are not shivered masts and broken timbers, the remains of some gallant vessel, that are seen on the turbulent surface of the waters, but the fragments of a broken-up world. Silence reigns over that ocean of death, but the stillness is eloquent of this great and

solemn truth—"God is of purer eyes than to look on iniquity, and will not at all acquit the guilty."

Brethren, men were wise if they would listen to the warning voice which comes from every wave of that dead and silent sea. "Stand in awe, and sin not," it says; "the wrath of God is revealed against all unrighteousness of men." This is the very truth that the men of Noah's days disbelieved—that men disbelieve now. In that early time, while Noah was preparing the ark for the saving of his house, and was a preacher of righteousness, warning them to flee from the wrath to come, they rejected his call to repentance; they went on eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, building and planting, buying and selling, and made a scoff of the coming destruction. The skies were cloudless, the earth was smiling, all nature was gay, and Noah was looked upon as a gloomy enthusiast, as an unwelcome disturber of the world's harmless joys. "God," they said, "is too merciful to punish, too good to bring a flood of waters on His fair creation, too benevolent to destroy man from the earth." And so the Flood came upon them unawares. "They knew not until it came." They

might have known it; they had warning enough, but they did not believe the warning; and so, when they were crying, Peace and safety, that day overtook them as a thief. "Sudden destruction came upon them, as travail upon a woman with child, and they did not escape."

So, brethren, is it now. Men have warning upon warning. They are told of the judgments that await sin, of the awful doom that is reserved for the transgressors, of the destruction that shall overtake a guilty world; still they will not believe. They persuade themselves that it will never be inflicted. They try to think that God is too merciful to punish; and so they quietly put away from them all those passages which speak of future retribution, of "a worm that dieth not, of a fire that is not quenched," and which assure us that the wicked, "and all the people that forget God, shall be turned into hell." It is the old lie of the devil, so readily received by the woman, repeated in their heart—"Thou shalt not surely die." They are willingly ignorant of the great truths that "God is faithful, and cannot deny Himself;" that though "we believe not, He abideth faithful." If God be not true to His

threatenings, however awful, then we have no security that He will be true to His promises. The truth of a heaven and the truth of a hell stand upon the same divine Word; and if the fears of the wicked prove unfounded, the hopes of the righteous must fall with them. And can this be possible? Have we then no certainty of a life beyond death? Nay, "let God be true, and every man a liar." Be assured that God plays neither with our hopes nor fears, and that, in regard to the threatenings as well as the promises of the Bible, "heaven and earth shall sooner pass than one tittle of the law fail."

But we also learn a lesson from Ararat of the mercy of God.

Looking at the Deluge, seeing that awful judgment, remembering how a guilty world was sunk under the rushing waters, the cry may be wrung from our lips, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Is His mercy clean gone for evermore?" And I answer, No. In judgment God remembered mercy. Mercy was as conspicuous as justice in the destruction of the old world by water. "Behold the goodness as well as the severity of God." He is represented as going about the work of punish-

ment with reluctance. He regrets that He is under the righteous necessity of coming out of His place to punish the children of men. "It repented the Lord that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him at His heart." What pathos in the words! It is most touching to hear God speak as if He would rather not have created man at all than that He should now be compelled to visit him with the terrors of His anger. His heart is torn with contending emotions, and He goes about the destruction of the sinner with such evident reluctance, that punishment may well be called, "His strange act." Oh! let us give the fullest belief to the long-suffering and mercy of God. "He executeth not justice speedily against the workers of iniquity." With slow and lingering steps He always proceeds to inflict a threatened judgment; and like a father who weeps over an unworthy son, and would fain, if it were possible, keep him in the house of which he is no longer worthy, and not banish him from His presence, He breaks forth into the affecting words—"How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine

heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together." "Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel!"

Again, the mercy of God is seen in the long period of patience that intervened between the threatening to bring a deluge upon the earth, and the execution of the dreadful judgment. "My Spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh"—he is hopelessly corrupt,—“yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years.” There was a period of one hundred and twenty years between the threatened doom and its execution; room was given for remonstrance on the part of God, and time for repentance on the part of man. During that long time Noah was preaching to the ungodly, warning them of the coming judgment, and persuading men, “by the terrors of the Lord,” to be reconciled to God. The ark, too, as it rose story by story, called upon men everywhere to repent and believe; and every stroke of the hammer, as it sounded on the nails, might have startled the impenitent in their sins, and

have urged them to “call upon the Lord while He was near, and to seek Him while He was to be found.” It was not until mercy had exhausted every endeavour to turn the sinful from the error of their ways, and failed in the attempt—not until Noah “condemned the world” by his faith—that God poured out His fury upon them, and a guilty world was submerged beneath the waters of the Flood.

Again, mercy was seen in that ark, which, built at God’s command, and guided by His almighty hand, moved over a shoreless sea, carrying within its walls, pitched within and without with pitch, those eight of the human race who were saved from the waters, and upon whose safety depended the peopling of the earth and the preservation of the Church of God. “The Lord is mindful of His own,” and He hid Noah in that asylum till the waters had subsided, and he and his sons and their wives could come forth upon a world purged from the presence of the wicked, and which God promised in solemn covenant should never more be destroyed by a flood.

Again, mercy might be seen in the olive-branch, sign and symbol of peace, which the dove brought

in her mouth to Noah as the first-fruits of the new world.

Mercy is also conspicuous in that Bow of brightness and beauty which God put in the cloud in token of His covenant-love. "And God said, This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you, and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations. I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth." Surely there is no greater proof of the mercy and goodness of God than the Bow which is in the cloud in the day of rain, emblem of the everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure, and reappearing in heaven. "Round about the throne," says St John, "there was a rainbow, in sight like unto an emerald." And let me remark here how the glories of grace surpass the glories of nature. While the bow in the cloud flings its brilliant arch over but a small segment of the earth, the bow of the covenant embraces within its circumference the whole Church of God, and, rising from earth to heaven, binds heaven and earth together in holy espousals, and assures us that both shall yet become one in Christ Jesus. So vast,

so ample is the circle of this rainbow, that it includes the ransomed of all times and countries, and throws its overshadowing glory over all kindreds and tongues, and languages and tribes—"a great multitude, which no man can number." It is not altogether, then, of judgment that the Flood speaks to us, grace is conspicuous here also; and as we see the ark resting on Ararat, and the fathers of the new world coming forth on the purified earth beneath the sign of the divine covenant, we may surely exclaim with one of old, "My song shall be of mercy and judgment: unto Thee, O Lord, will I sing."

One other lesson, the last, from Ararat. It is Noah's faith. "By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house." "Noah had found grace in the eyes of the Lord," and the Lord, of His own merciful goodness, had promised to save him and his family from the coming deluge. At the same time, the Lord told him he must expect to be delivered only in a certain way: he must build an ark; he must make it after a certain pattern; he must there seek refuge, with his family; and doing so, and

shut in by the hand of God himself, he shall ride securely within its walls over the billows that engulphed a buried world. And Noah believed God, and obeyed God: "he did according to all that was commanded him." He did not doubt or reason in the matter. It was enough for him that God had spoken. The sky above him was fair. The world around him was quiet and still. There was no outward appearance of the storm that was gathering, of the tempest so soon about to burst. But before his vision swept a destroying deluge; in his ears sounded the shrieks of a drowning world, and, "moved with fear," he went on, amid the scoffs and ridicule of the ungodly, year after year, calmly, quietly, unmoved by the unbelief around him, preparing an ark for the saving of his house.

Ask you the nature of true faith? See it illustrated in Noah. His was the faith of a little child, the faith which takes God at His word, let Him say what He will; which believes when it cannot see, and obeys when it cannot understand. Brother, is your faith like this? "Moved by fear" of God's coming judgments, have you not indeed "prepared an ark for

the saving of your house," but have you sought and found shelter in the Ark which God himself has provided, and which, with open door, offers an asylum in the coming storm? The Lord Jesus Christ is that Ark. He will be the refuge of all that trust in Him in the rising flood. "Come, my people," He shall say, "enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee; hide thyself, as it were, for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast." Brethren, there is a tempest, if slowly, yet surely gathering, which shall soon burst, and overwhelm the impenitent in destruction, to their surprise and dismay. "As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man." "They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day Noe entered into the ark, and the Flood came and destroyed them all." Men will be unprepared. The merchant will be on 'Change, the man of business in his counting-house, the statesman in the halls of council, the woman of fashion in her drawing-room, the man of pleasure at his club, the chemist in his laboratory, the student at his books. The world will be going on its heedless, thoughtless, godless ways. The scoffer will be saying, "Where is the promise

of His coming, for all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation?" When lo! a lightning-flash, a thunder-crash, and "the sign of the Son of man" in the heavens. The fiery storm bursts, the long-threatened judgment has come at length. Then ruin—utter ruin to the ungodly and the unbelieving. "For the heavens and earth which are now, by the same word" that brought the Deluge upon the earth, "are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men." "Oh that Day! that great Day! when the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, and the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burnt up!" The fires of that awful Day shall spare nothing that will burn; the flames shall be at furnace-heat. The universe shall be wrapped in an atmosphere of flame. There shall be fire everywhere—above, beneath, around; fire—consuming, devouring fire. "Alas! who shall live when God doeth this?" "Who may abide the day of His coming? Who shall stand when He appeareth? for He is like a refiner's fire, and like fuller's soap." Ay, and then "every man's work shall be made manifest; for the day shall declare it, because it shall be

revealed by fire, and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is." And who shall abide God's holy fires? They only who are in Christ; they only who have "fled for refuge to the hope set before them in the gospel;" they only who have built into the structure of their lives "the gold and silver and precious stones" of faith and love and loyalty to Christ, for these shall come out of the furnace indestructible, and shining all the brighter from the fire. All who are not in Christ shall perish; and all who build on the one foundation, "wood and hay and stubble," worldly habits, unscriptural opinions, superficial views, shall see their work consumed and shrivelled in the flame, though they themselves are saved—just "plucked as brands from the burning," "saved, yet so as by fire." But all who rest on Christ and live for Christ shall stand when their Master appeareth. And what shall it matter to them that the heavens, being on fire, shall be dissolved, and "the elements shall melt with fervent heat," "for we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." And in this new creation, arising out of the old, when the universe has

passed through its baptism of fire, and rises from its ashes purified and beautified and restored, "the tabernacle of God shall be with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people; and God himself shall be with them, and be their God."

Solemn truths these taught by Ararat—first Mountain that meets us in the Bible—but glorious truths also; and if we listen to its teaching, this is one of the "hills that shall bring us peace." We are living in a world of fading forms—a world that is doomed; the things that are seen are temporal and temporary, they are to "wax old as doth a garment," to be "folded up as a vesture," to be "shrivelled like a scroll." And what effect is this to have on us who live in this changing scene? Listen to the apostle—"Seeing, then, that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of person ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?" Or again, take the words that follow as the personal and practical application of the whole subject—"Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent, that ye be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless."

MORIAH,
THE MOUNTAIN OF SACRIFICE.

III.

MORIAH.

“And He said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.”—GENESIS xxii. 2.

THE Mountain that we are now to ascend is “one of the mountains in the land of Moriah.” What the name of the Mountain was we are not told; but it was a conspicuous one, visible from “afar off.” It is generally called Moriah, and is supposed to be identical with the mountain on which the temple was built, and where Jehovah appeared to David, in a place which David prepared in the threshing-floor of Arumah the Jebusite. I see nothing incompatible in the narrative with such a view. I accept, therefore, as proven, that the very spot of the sacrifice of Isaac was the spot on which the temple was built in after ages.

Moriah, though possessing none of the natural grandeur of Ararat, and though not of great eleva-

tion amongst the hills of Judea, yet has associations which invest it with a peculiar interest. In order to give you a distinct idea of the locality of this mountain, I would remind you that Jerusalem was built upon hills, and surrounded by hills. Zion was the western hill, and on this the city of David stood. Down on a lower level, and separated from it by a broad valley, was Moriah. This valley was afterwards filled up, with the direct object, it is said, of connecting the city of David with the temple which was built by Solomon on the summit of this hill. Moriah lay to the north-east of the city.

Travellers who have gone on pilgrimage to these holy places tell us that through the filling up of the valleys that lie between them, Moriah and Zion are now scarcely discernible as elevations on the summit of the broad mountain ridge on which Jerusalem lies. But more than one change has passed over the Holy City. "Ichabod" may be written on its walls; for the heart is saddened as we think that Moriah, where Abraham offered up his son—Moriah, where rose the magnificent temple of Solomon, with its walls of cedar and roof of gold, that holy temple which was hallowed

by the mystic Sheckinah and consecrated to the service of the King of kings,—is at present occupied by a splendid Moslem mosque, built by the Caliph Omar in honour of the Mohammedan faith. The infidel is now in possession of the ground where stood in all its glory and beauty, “exceeding magnificent,” the stately house of God; and the Muezzin of Islam is chanted on the spot where in ancient time the psalm of triumphant praise ascended to the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. But it is not with Moriah’s present, so much as with Moriah’s past, that I desire to occupy your attention. What are the teachings with which the voices are laden that come to us from this Mount? They are both solemn and important. We learn on Moriah lessons most profitable and instructive, and which we may well lay to heart.

We are taught, first, the power and blessedness of faith in God. Abraham has been called “the father of the faithful.” His whole life was a walk of faith. He is commanded to leave his country and his kindred, summoned to go he knows not where; and he immediately obeys. He is bidden to believe that though he is now a solitary man, childless and houseless, his seed shall be as many in number as the

countless orbs which shine in the clear, unclouded vault of the midnight sky. He does not hesitate; he takes God at His word, and feels assured the promise shall be fulfilled. He is told that though he possesses not a foot of land which he can call his own, yet to him and to his seed shall be given the whole stretch of country from the river of Egypt unto the great river—the river Euphrates, and that “in his seed shall all nations of the earth be blessed.” Though he is a stranger and a pilgrim all through life, pitching his tent to-day, and removing it to-morrow, yet he lives and dies in the confident belief that it shall belong to him and his. “Looking not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen”—the life of this saint of the olden time, every journey he undertook, every march he made, was entirely one of faith; and confessing that his home was not here, “he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose Builder and whose Maker is God.”

But his faith reaches its climax on Moriah, the mount where, laying Isaac on the altar, it endures its greatest trial and achieves its greatest triumph. You know the pathetic story of Abraham's piety.

and faith—"And it came to pass after these things that God did tempt Abraham, and He said unto him, Abraham : and he said, Behold, here I am. And He said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah ; and offer him there for a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of. And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt-offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him." How could Abraham obey without a murmur and without a question, without even a remonstrance, a command so terrible ! How could he for a moment endure the thought of staining his hands with the blood of his son—his only son, " Isaac, whom he loved ! " It fills us with wonder that his reason did not fail, that his heart did not break. How had he the courage to go through that dreadful three days' journey with his happy, unsuspecting son at his side, each step that they took bringing him nearer to the place where the sacrifice was to be consummated !

Surely those were days never to be forgotten,

and that must have left their marks on the patriarch's memory and heart. Every step of the way must have been like placing the foot on a heated ploughshare. The morning broke with sweet light over the hills; it brought him no charm, for it only awoke him to another day's painful journey. The glow of the noontide flushed the warm skies, but it hurt his eyes with its unshaded glare, for it was in sad contrast with the darkness within: and the tender shadows of the evening, veiling the landscape in purple mists, only told him he was a day's march nearer the dreaded end. So the solemn night, "clothed in the beauty of ten thousand stars," would seem to him like a mockery of the covenant-promise, "look now towards heaven, and tell the stars if thou art able to number them; and He said unto him, So shall thy seed be." And at length when they reached the place, and climbed the hill, how had he the resolution to bind the naked limbs of his child, to draw the knife from its sheath, and raise his arm for the stroke? If he had fainted beneath the strain; if he had uttered a cry for mercy, and fallen lifeless to the earth, we should have thought it only the natural termination of

such a scene. But no! faith is triumphant; faith conquers nature; faith puts the knife into the father's hand, and faith nerves his arm to strike the blow. The death of his son will make him childless, yet he believes that he shall be the father of a mighty nation; he believes that when the fire shall have burnt the body of Isaac to ashes, he shall be raised from the dead, and that after the sacrifice has been accomplished, the lad, restored to his arms, shall descend with him the mount which in the morning they had climbed together. "By faith," says St Paul, "Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac, and he which had received the promises offered up his only-begotten son, of whom it was said, In Isaac shall thy seed be called, accounting that God was able to raise him up even from the dead." Thus the apostle, magnifying the power of faith, and showing how "to him that believeth all things are possible," teaches us to say, "Lord, I believe, help mine unbelief!" "Lord, increase my faith!"

On Moriah other lessons are to be learnt. Here we, like Abraham, may "see Christ's day,"—though not like him, "afar off,"—and seeing it, may be glad.

Whatever is the struggle in his heart as he heard the command of God, the patriarch bows the head and is silent. "It is the Lord; let Him do what seemeth Him good." "Though He slay"—not my son only, but "me, yet will I trust in Him." And so they travel on, the father and the boy of promise and of hope, and journey together from Beersheba to Moriah, and each day brings them nearer the spot where the altar is to be raised and the sacrifice is to be offered. When at length the place comes in view where the fiery ordeal is to be undergone, he calmly says to his young men, "Abide ye here with the ass, and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you." He can bear no human witness to this deed of sacrifice; no eye but God's and his own is to see the consummation of that dread command. The father must be alone in the terrible struggle he is to pass through. But they will "come again to the young men." Yes, this is certain,—as certain as that God is true and cannot deny Himself. And now the old man takes the wood of the burnt-offering, and lays it upon Isaac his son, and he takes the fire in his hand, and a knife, and they go both of them

together. And now there fall from Isaac's lips words full of the deepest pathos, and which must have gone like the piercings of a sword to Abraham's heart. "And Isaac spake unto Abraham, and said, My father. And he said, Here I am, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?" In the preparation made by his father for this costly oblation, Isaac, who was well instructed in the nature of sacrifice, and who had seen many a lamb taken from the fold and laid on the altar, observed one serious omission. There was the wood,—there was the fire,—but where was the lamb? But Abraham knew full well that the lamb was ready, and he said, in words that struggled for utterance, "My son, God will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt-offering." Let me give you what follows in the simple but exquisitely touching words of the sacred narrative:—"And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood. And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. And the angel of the Lord called unto him out of

heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I. And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me. And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt-offering in the stead of his son. And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-jireh: as it is said to this day, In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen."

The whole of this exquisitely pathetic history is typical: each one of its circumstances was a glass wherein Abraham "saw Christ's day afar off." In Isaac bearing the wood of the burnt-offering to Moriah, we see Jesus bearing His cross up the hill of scorn with aching feet and throbbing brow, obedient even unto death. In Isaac bound and laid upon the altar, resigned to die, dumb, and opening not his mouth, we see Christ laid as a sacrifice upon the accursed tree, and willingly offering up His life as a propitiation for sin. For we hear no murmur from Isaac's lips, not a word

of remonstrance; we see no struggle; he is submissive under his father's hands, patient, resigned; his very silence seems to say, "Not my will, but thine." Abraham represents the Father in the act of awakening the sword of justice against the man that is His Fellow, even against the only-begotten Son, who was in His bosom from the beginning. In the ram provided as Isaac's substitute there is a vivid representation of the great principle of the gospel—the principle of substitution; and in the restoration of Isaac to Abraham's embrace, though not without sacrifice, we clearly see the resurrection of the Son of God, and His return to the bosom of His Father. So clear was the type given to the patriarch on Moriah of the great mystery of Christ's suffering and triumph, that our Lord might well say to the Jews, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it, and was glad."

There is one respect in which the type fails, and comes short of the antitype. No one interfered to save the Son of God from suffering, or to spare the sacrifice on the Father's part. "He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore His own arm brought

salvation unto Him, and His righteousness, it sustained Him." Jesus came into the world to die. He came to give His life a ransom for many, and by dying in the room and in the stead of sinners, to reconcile the world to God. "I am the good Shepherd: the good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep." "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father." Therefore, when His hour was come, "He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem," and allowed Himself to be tried and condemned, to be mocked and buffeted and spat upon, "giving His back to the smiters, and His cheeks to them that plucked off the hair." And to complete the sacrifice, He suffered Himself to be nailed to the cross, and laying down His life, He bowed His head, and gave up the ghost. Then the bloody and mangled body, taken down from the cross, was received into the hands of loving women, who swathed it in fine linen, fragrant with spices, and laid it reverently and tenderly in the grave.

But whilst the Son was being bruised and put to grief, falsely accused and hastily condemned, scourged and mocked and crucified, derided and reviled even on the cross, crowned with thorns and pierced by nails, was His Father unmoved? Was He not stirred to sorrow as He saw His Son in an agony in the garden, prostrate on the ground, sweating great drops of blood, and praying that, “if it were possible, the cup might pass away?” Was not His heart pained by the sufferings of the judgment-hall and the anguish on Calvary, where, as the sword of justice pressed deeper and deeper into the bosom of His Only-begotten, there arose, loud and clear in the darkness, the awful cry, “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani—My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?” I ask, did not the Father feel for the anguish of the Son? Was He not moved by the prayer, touched by the cry? I do not venture upon an answer, for here we tread on the borders of a great mystery. But the gift of Christ is always spoken of as being a sacrifice on the Father’s part. “God so loved the world:” in that little word “so” there is an eternity of meaning which it will take an eternity to comprehend—“God so loved the world, that

He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." "Herein is love," as though it were nowhere else to be seen, "not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." "He that spared not His own Son, but gave Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" But the Father's sorrow over His Son passed away, like Abraham's over Isaac, for He received Him back from the dead. God protected the dead body of His Son as it lay in the tomb, and, standing between it and the inroads of decay, He justified the words of prophecy, "Thou wilt not leave my soul in Hades, neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption." "He brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep." And to the day of His resurrection, as in some respects more glorious than the day of His birth, the Apostle Paul applies these words, "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten Thee." A feeble infant He was laid in the cradle at Bethlehem, a mighty conqueror He came from His sepulchre in the garden, after destroying principalities and

powers, and making a show of them openly, triumphing over them on His cross. “He was declared to be the Son of God with power by His resurrection from the dead,” that resurrection being the crown of His labours, the seal of His acceptance, the evidence of His atonement, and the glorious reward of His death.

Thus we see on Moriah the mysteries of redeeming grace—the love of God in providing the lamb for a burnt-offering, the humiliation and death of the Saviour, and His triumphant resurrection from the dead. Let us pause for a moment on one thought which naturally flows from the sacred narrative. It is this: we have the very same proof of the love of God to us that God had of Abraham’s love to Him. God’s words to the patriarch, after he passed triumphantly through the trial of his faith, were these—“Now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me.” And cannot we say the same? Applying the words to the eternal Father, may we not exclaim, “Now we know that Thou lovest us, seeing Thou hast not withheld Thy Son, Thine only Son, from us?” The evidence ought to be enough for us; what greater

proof could be given, what greater can we desire of the love of God to us men? What other sign would we ask from heaven? Surely none. In giving us this manifestation of His love, God may be said to have exhausted Himself. Let us rest in this love, and go on our way rejoicing, loving Him because He first loved us, and letting that love so flow into our heart that it shall sweep away before it, in one mighty current, all sin and unbelief, all coldness and indifference, all formalism and self-righteousness, and by an inward consecration and an outward obedience prove itself to be "the fulfilling of the law."

One other lesson, and the last—a lesson of self-surrender. "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac; and he that had received the promises offered up his only-begotten son, of whom it was said, that in Isaac shall thy seed be called, accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from whence he also received him in figure." O Abraham! great was thy faith, and as great thy self-sacrifice. Is such faith, such self-surrender, ours, who live under a clearer dispensation? Are we in this the children of faithful Abraham. God calls us to yield Him

something that we hold dear ; some friendship, or alliance which is inconsistent with our Christian profession ; some method of securing a personal gain or advantage which is not altogether upright or true ; some blessing which we greatly value. Are we ready to give it to Him ? Are we ready to take the knife, and by cutting off the right hand or the right foot, or by plucking out the right eye, to give proof that we count all things but loss that we may please and obey Him ? Or does He ask us to surrender some object of tender affection ; some one that we love, a parent or child, a wife or husband, brother or friend ? Does He ask our “ Isaac,” our dear one, our well-beloved ? That son so dutiful and hopeful ? that daughter so fair and affectionate ? That partner of your joys and sorrows, so sympathising and true ? The friend whom you love as your own soul, with whom you walked to the house of God, and with whom you took sweet counsel ? And if God is thus putting your faith to the trial, or if He should do so—if He should break some tie or rend some cord—if He should wound you in some tender point, can you yield the sacrifice He requires ? Can you say, “ Not my will, but Thine

be done?" And are you comforted in believing that God is able to raise up your "Isaac" even from the dead, and that He will so raise him up? Not indeed at once—not as the widow's son was raised from the bier, and restored to his mother's arms—not as Lazarus was given back from the grave to the embrace of his sisters; this you might wish, as with breaking heart you look on the cold face of the dead, and feel that a light has passed from the world for ever and for ever. But are you comforted by the thought that "your brother shall rise again," that "them that sleep in Jesus God will bring with Him at His coming?" Are you satisfied, having this hope, to part for a season with those in whom you have garnered up your heart?—are you content, looking forward to the time when the "Lord shall come, and all the saints with Him," to "be still, and know that it is God?" True, the waiting time may be weary, and the interval seem long, but it is but a "little while" after all, and "He that shall come will come, and will not tarry," and the weeping shall only endure for a night, whilst joy cometh "in the morning." And in the morning, "when the Day breaks and the shadows flee away," when the

light of the resurrection shines brightly over the darkness of earth, when you and the loved ones are restored to one another again, then all will be well. That meeting shall be followed by no parting, and they who have “suffered with Christ shall be also glorified together,” and made “pillars in the temple of their God—shall go no more out for ever.”

And so, brethren, if we learn aright the lesson which *Moriah* teaches, we shall find this to be one of “the Hills which bring peace.” For here we are taught to live walking by faith, and not by sight—to “endure, as seeing Him who is invisible”—to “hope against hope”—to believe that all the promises of God are in Christ Jesus, “yea, and in Him, amen”—to feel assured that “all things work together for good to them that love God, who are the called according to His purpose.” Here we are taught that a light shall yet dawn over the darkness of the grave which shall scatter all its shadows, and the anticipation of which even now thrills the heart with “a joy unspeakable and full of glory.”

HOREB,
THE MOUNTAIN OF VISION.



IV.

HOREB.

“Now Moses kept the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian : and he led the flock to the back-side of the desert, and came to the mountain of God, even to Horeb.”—EXOD. iii. 1.

HOREB and Sinai are not two distinct mountains, they are parts of the same magnificent range, some of the cliffs of which rise to the height of nine thousand three hundred feet, and are of the noblest forms. Horeb itself rises perpendicularly from the plain about four thousand feet above the level of the sea, and is formed of masses of deep-red porphyry and granite. Its height is greater than that of Sinai which towers close by in twin majesty, and it is much less easy of access. Horeb is now known as Jebal Katrine, and Sinai as Jebal Musa—the Mountain of Moses. “Jebal Katrine”—the Mountain of Katrine—derives its

name from a convent which was built upon it in the fourth century, to the memory of St Catherine, by Helena, the mother of Constantine, to commemorate the conversion and martyrdom of a daughter of one of the kings of Alexandria. It is said that after the saint's death angels bore her body to "the Mountain of God," and buried it on the summit.

The district surrounding Horeb is called "the back-side of the desert," and here it was that Moses came to feed the flock of Jethro his father-in-law. Whereas there is little or no verdure on the slopes of the neighbouring cliffs, there is here, under the awful shadows of the Mount of God, a vast, green plain, where is excellent pasturage for flocks.

It is to the scene to which the deep solitude of Horeb was witness, and to the lessons with which it is pregnant, that I now desire to direct your attention. I shall read to you the sacred narrative from the second to the end of the sixth verse—
"And the Angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush; and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed. And Moses said,

I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt. And when the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I. And He said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground. Moreover He said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God."

In considering this simple yet sublime account of God's interview with Moses in the lonely stillness of the desert, I am, in the first place, struck with wonder at the thought of the divine dealings with man. How strange the providence of God! How little we can tell of the way by which He intends to lead His people! That feeble infant wailing on its mother's breast, what shall be its future? Who can say what great things it may please God to accomplish by its instrumentality! When Moses was born, though he was "a proper child," "fair to God," how unconscious were his parents that so much depended on his life! how

little they dreamed of the great space he was to fill, not only in the eyes of his nation, but of the world! And when they entrusted him to the frail ark, woven of bulrushes, and committed him to the waters of the Nile, how far from their thoughts was the idea that in him Israel should find her future deliverer from Egypt, her future lawgiver and leader to the promised land! Little can the parent dream of the possibilities of good or evil that slumber in the heart of the child now so innocent, so ignorant of evil, so guileless, so guiltless, and whose life seems as fragile and frail as the flower. When Judas was born, and his mother fondled him on her knee, there was nothing to presage the awful future in store for him, whose name was to become a proverb and a by-word for all that is base and infamous—who sold his Master, God's only Son and man's only Saviour, for thirty pieces of silver—and in whose ears his Lord uttered the appalling words, "It had been good for that man if he had not been born."

Moses was a great man, whether considered as a Leader or a Legislator, an Historian, a Philosopher, or a Prophet. As a Leader, he freed

a nation of slaves from their fetters, and bringing them forth from the land of bondage, and controlling them by his moral power, he formed them into a great people, and conducted them, in the face of formidable enemies, and through "the waste, howling wilderness," to the borders of Canaan. As a Legislator, he established in Israel a form of government and a code of laws, not only adapted to the circumstances of the people at the time, but which are models of equity and justice, and, as a standard of morality, are perfect. As an Historian, how surpassingly grand his narrative of the creation! how touching his episodes of the early world, and the men who then walked the earth! The story of Abraham, the trials of Isaac, the life of Jacob, the fortunes of Joseph, are eminently graphic and dramatic; and full of interest and of pathos are the moving incidents of the journey through the desert, with its alternations of cloud and sunshine, light and gloom. As a Philosopher, does not the son of Amram stand in the foremost rank? Though since his day "knowledge has increased," and "many have run to and fro," and science has enlarged her boundaries, have not the facts which he has stated concerning

the creation, the primeval chaos, the gradual building up of the grand framework of nature, the formation of light, the peopling of the earth with its varied inhabitants, been corroborated by the discoveries of modern research ; and though many have endeavoured to prove the Mosaic narrative “ a cunningly devised fable,” has it not stood unshaken the direct assaults of two thousand years ? As a Prophet and Poet, does he not hold a foremost place ? In what sublime words he speaks of the fortunes of the twelve tribes, rising to the loftiest poetic heights as he winds up his farewell address to the weeping people ere he goes up to Mount Nebo, to die there at the command of God ! For example, “ There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun, who rideth upon the heaven in thy help, and in His excellency on the sky. The eternal God is thy Refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms : and He shall thrust out the enemy from before thee, and shall say, Destroy them. Israel then shall dwell in safety alone ; the fountain of Jacob shall be upon a land of corn and wine ; also his heaven shall drop down dew. Happy art thou, O Israel : who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord, the

Shield of thy help, and who is the Sword of thy excellency ! and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee ; and thou shalt tread upon their high places.”

Moses passed forty years of his life in Egypt and forty years in Midian, where he fled from the face of Pharaoh, after he had avenged one of his brethren, a Hebrew, whom he saw wronged and smitten by an Egyptian. He is about eighty years old when he comes before us on the green plain that stretches at the foot of Horeb, and sees “the angel of the Lord in a flame of fire, out of the midst of the burning bush.” Jehovah, in choosing this shepherd, with more than threescore and ten years on his head, and whilst he was feeding the flock of Jethro, with crook in hand in the remote desert, acted upon the principle enunciated by St Paul in the well-known words—“God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise ; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty ; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen ; yea, and things that are not, to confound things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence.” Or as

the holy man of old, who was moved by the Holy Ghost, said, "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts." Though Moses by training and by knowledge—for "he was skilled in all the wisdom of the Egyptians"—was well fitted for the great work which God entrusted to his hands; yet what in the eyes of Pharaoh was he? what in the eyes of the world was he? what even in the eyes of his own people?—A keeper of sheep; a man without riches, or power, or strength, or influence to back him; one whom even his own countrymen had rejected—for when he sought to mediate between two of the Hebrews in their strife, and said to him that did the wrong, "Wherefore smitest thou thy fellow?" He made answer, "Who made thee a prince and a judge over us? Intendest thou to kill me as thou killedst the Egyptian?"

Yet God's ways not being as our ways, nor God's thoughts as our thoughts, such is the man that He sends to the proud and powerful king of Egypt with the words—"Let my people go, that they may serve me."

Let us look at the vision which Moses saw in Horeb:—"And the Angel of the Lord appeared

unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of the bush : and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed. And Moses said, I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt." In the act of drawing near to look into this wondrous mystery, his steps are arrested by the voice of God, saying, "Moses, Moses ! Draw not nigh hither : put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." Then this Angel of the Lord reveals Himself to Moses—"I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." We wonder not that Moses, when he hears in whose presence he is standing, should hide his face, and be afraid to look upon God. And now come words from the lips of God which must have fallen with a sweet and comforting power on the ears of the trembling man, as with face hidden in his mantle he waits the divine pleasure—"I have surely seen the afflictions of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters ; for I know their sorrows ; and I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of

that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey; unto the place of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites. Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come unto me: and I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them."

We learn from these beautiful and tender and compassionate words of God the meaning of that burning bush. It was a symbol of the suffering condition of the suffering Church. Israel was in a captive and oppressed and afflicted condition. Fire is often used in Scripture to pourtray trial. We read of "fiery trials," "fiery darts." "I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction," says the Lord of His people. "Glorify God in the fires," is a divine command.

Brethren, God's people have always been more or less an afflicted people. The Church has always had to encounter bitter, sometimes bloody, trials. We have read, now with tears, now with indignation, how in the olden time the enemy raged, and prepared his fiercest tortures for the worthiest and the best, and how he hunted to the

death all who, taking up their cross, would “live godly in Christ Jesus.” It drew the sword and sharpened the axe and kindled the stake, and shed the blood of the saints like water, by this means accomplishing the promise of our Saviour to His disciples—“In the world ye shall have tribulation.”

Thus in the ancient days did “the men of whom the world was not worthy” suffer for God, counting it all joy when they fell into divers trials for the truth’s sake, and “esteeming the reproach of Christ” greater honour than the fairest garland that men could have woven round their brow.

And, brethren, “the offence of the cross has not ceased.” It is still true as in the days that are past, “All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” There may not be the same open violence as there was in the former times; the laws under which we live, thank God, prevent this in our own country, where, owing to the civil and religious liberty which are direct blessings of the Reformation, every man may sit under his own vine and fig-tree, none daring to make him afraid. But where there is not open

persecution there may be secret, as I believe there is in many a family where a wife or a child, a brother or a sister, or a servant, incurs the dislike of the rest of the household, because of his or her decided allegiance to God. For the life of the converted member of a household becomes a silent rebuke to the unconverted; and such rebuke excites the enmity of the rest, and so there results dislike, and the heart-burnings of a determined opposition. The hands may be tied, but the tongue is free; and the jeer and the jest and the scoff prove that our Lord's words still are true to the letter—"If ye were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." There are martyrs now just as truly as there were of old; and the household divided against itself, the family disturbances occasioned by religion, the man set at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, prove that though the flames of a fierce persecution are quenched, our Lord's words are verified even at the present day—"I came not to send peace on earth; I came not

to send peace, but a sword." Thus through these trials, and others of a different nature to which they are exposed, for "many are the afflictions of the righteous," the Church of Christ may be still likened to the bush which Moses saw in the desert of Horeb, and which "burnt with fire."

Let us now look at the preservation of the Church. This is stated in the words, "The bush was not consumed."

The Church of Christ is indestructible. By the Church of Christ I do not mean this or that branch of the Church, this or that communion, nor do I identify it with any particular kind of government or form of worship. Individual churches have erred and sinned; the candlestick has been removed, the lamp quenched, the shrine fallen into decay.

By the Church of Christ I mean the true body of believers—"the blessed company of all faithful people"—the elect whom God has "knit together in one communion and fellowship"—the people of whom Jesus said, "This is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which He hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day." This is "the Church which

Christ loved," for which "He gave Himself," that He might "sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word:" and this Church He shall "present to Himself a glorious Church, not having a spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, for it shall be holy and without blemish." Against this Church "the gates of hell shall not prevail;" death shall have no power over it—it shall pass unharmed through the humiliation of the grave, and shall rise in immortal beauty, to be wedded in eternal espousals to the Lamb, and to be His bride through the ages. And what is true of the Church collectively, is of course true of every individual believer. "My sheep," says Christ, "shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." "I am the Resurrection and the Life: he that believeth on me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth on me shall never die." Beautiful and blessed words! They "fill us with all joy and peace in believing," and cause us to "abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost." Through whatever dangers Christ's people have to pass, whatever temptations they have to encounter, whatever trials they have to undergo, though their

escapes are so narrow that they are “scarcely saved,”—“saved so as by fire;” yet will He make good His own words—“I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish.” No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper, and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn.”

Let us look at the reason why the bush though burning was not consumed. This was not natural. Fire destroys. Apply the flame to the tree, and it will burn it down to ashes. Why, then, was the bush unharmed?—why did it flourish through the fires? The Angel of the Lord was in the midst of it. He preserved it by His presence; not a bud was injured, not a tender leaf destroyed; the dews rested upon its branches still, and it flourished green and beautiful as of old. So because God is in the midst of His Church she passes safely through the flames of persecution and trial, and though exposed to the fire, is not consumed. “The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty. He will save; He will rejoice over thee with joy; He will rest in His love; He will joy over thee with singing. He is with His people in their low estate, ever near to protect and defend. In the

furnace He is by their side ; in all their afflictions He is afflicted, and the Angel of His presence saves them." His own promise is—a promise always fulfilled to them that trust in Him—"When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee ; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee : when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee." "Happy is the people that is in such a case ; yea, blessed are the people that have the Lord for their God."

I remark again, that we are taught how terrible to sinful man is the near revelation of God ! When Moses was turning aside to see this great sight—the bush burning, and not consumed—God arrested his steps with the words—"Draw not nigh hither : put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." Moreover He said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face ; for he was afraid to look upon God. This vision even of a covenant-God fills him with fear. The presence of God, in which there is fulness of joy to the saints in heaven, for there "the pure

in heart see Him," "their eyes see the King in His beauty,"—gives him neither bliss nor delight, but strikes him with an awful dread. And why? Because the manifestation of the Holy One must be terrible to the unholy. Flesh and blood shrink from nearness to God—from standing in His immediate presence—from seeing, as it were, His face. When Isaiah had that wondrous vision of the Lord, high and lifted up, sitting upon a throne, and His train filled the temple, he was filled with consternation and dismay, and cried, "Woe is me! for I am undone; for I am a man of unclean lips." When John, "the disciple whom Jesus loved," and who leaned on the Saviour's breast at the last supper, saw the vision of Christ's glory in Patmos, he "fell at His feet as dead," and was not reassured until he felt the touch of His hand, and heard the words—"Fear not, I am the First and the Last; I am He that liveth, and was dead: and behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death." So was it with all those saints of old to whom it was given to see a vision of God's glory: the cry wrung from them was ever this, "We shall perish; for we have seen the Lord

of Hosts.” And surely the reason must be because that terrible light revealing the All-holy reveals man to himself, and shows him his sin and his guiltiness before God. “I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear,” says Job; “but now mine eye seeth Thee, wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.” O brethren! it is well to make this discovery of our unworthiness now, and to be humbled before God, and seek His mercy and forgiveness, and not to have the discovery burst upon us for the first time when the soul passes into the light of His presence at death, and it is too late to obtain the pardon without which heaven must be lost. It is only as we are in Christ that we can ever stand in that awful presence and not fear to look upon God, or that His presence can have any hope or blessing for us. It is of those who are Christ’s that the words are spoken—“They see His face, and His name is in their foreheads.” If we are Christ’s, then all promise is ours; for He that was “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob,” is now “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,” and through the eternal Son “we have boldness and access

with confidence to God," and breaking through the spirit of bondage again to fear, can cry in the Spirit of adoption, "Abba, Father."

I must pass over some truths, full of interest, which meet us in this passage, such as the demonstration of the soul's immortality, and the assurance of the body's resurrection, as deduced by our Lord from the words—"I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Jesus argues in reply to the Sadducees from this covenant title which God was still pleased to claim many centuries after the death of the patriarchs, that the patriarchs must be living, and must rise again to receive the fulfilment of the promises made to them as men in the body. "As touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living."

I might dwell, too, on God's tender compassion and mercy for His people, and His intimate knowledge of all that touches them or affects them. "I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their

cry by reason of their taskmasters ; for I know their sorrows, and am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey.” Oh the pity and condescension of God ! He takes heed to—ay, and He takes to heart—all the sorrows and afflictions of His people. Not a sigh of theirs escapes Him ; not a tear is unknown to Him ; not a cry wrung from their lips is unnoticed by Him ; He knows, He feels for all, and stoops from His heaven to comfort and console. Most gracious God ! He who numbers the stars of heaven, who binds the sweet influences of the Pleiades, numbers the very hairs of His people’s heads, binds up the broken in heart, and “comforteth them that are cast down.” Yea, He “putteth their tears into His bottle,” is touched with a feeling of their infirmities, and in all their afflictions He is afflicted too.

The last thought which I take from the scene at Horeb is this—the enduring impression it left in the mind of Moses. He never forgot it. It was with him when he died, fresh as it was at the first. He receives, you will remember, a command

from God to go up to Mount Nebo, and die there. Moses calmly and readily obeys; but before he makes that last journey to the top of the Mount to breathe forth his soul into the hand of God, he will leave a blessing behind him for the children of his people. And so he utters a benediction on the various tribes, naming them lovingly one by one. When he speaks of Joseph, these are his words—"Blessed of the Lord be his land, for the precious things of heaven, for the dew, and for the deep that coucheth beneath, and for the precious fruits brought forth by the sun, and for the precious things put forth by the moon, and for the chief things of the ancient mountains, and for the precious things of the lasting hills, and for the precious things of the earth, and fulness thereof, *and for the good-will of Him that dwelt in the bush*; let the blessing come upon the head of Joseph, and upon the top of the head of him that was separated from his brethren."

"The good-will of Him that dwelt in the bush." Here his thoughts chiefly rested. On this his memory fondly dwelt.

That "good-will" had been a stay and a rejoicing to him in the past; and now for the future,

for the death that was before him, it would be amply sufficient too. That "good-will" had made his life a blessing, and that "good-will" would make his death a gain.

Brethren, if you know "the good-will of Him that dwelt in the bush," happy are you; you may go on your way rejoicing, knowing that "all things shall work together for your good." In that "good-will" is included all grace for the present life; in that "good-will" is wrapped up all glory for the future. He that has this "good-will" has all things—"All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos, or Cephas, the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come. All are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's." Rich inheritance! And as sure as rich; for just as "the good-will of Him that dwelt in the bush" attended Moses from Horeb, through all the forty years' wandering in the wilderness, preserved him in all trials and temptations, soothed him amid all the murmurings and rebellions of the Israelites, and brought him in safety to the very borders of Canaan, where the divine hands received his spirit, and the divine hands buried him; so will that "good will" accompany us through the pilgrim-

age of life, will keep and protect and shield, and at length bring us into that Presence where without fear or dread we shall look upon the face of God, the Presence where is fulness of joy, and where are "pleasures for evermore." And so if we read the lesson of Horeb aright, we shall find it to be one of "the hills which shall bring us peace."

SINAI,
THE MOUNTAIN OF TERROR.

V.

SINAI.

“And Mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire; and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly.”—Exod. xix. 18.

NEARLY in the centre of the peninsula which stretches between the horns of the Red Sea lies a wedge of granite, gronstein, and porphyry rock, rising to between eight thousand and nine thousand feet above the sea-level. Its shape resembles a scalene triangle, with a crescent cut from its northern or longer side, on which there is a broad skirting tract of old red sandstone, reaching nearly from the Gulf of Suez to the Gulf of Akaba, and traversed by a few ridges, chiefly of tertiary formation, running nearly north-west and south-east. On the south-west side of this triangle a wide alluvial plain, narrowing, however, towards the north, lines the coast of the Gulf of Suez; whilst that on the eastern or Akaba coast is so narrow,

as almost to disappear. Between these alluvial edges and the granitic mass a strip of the same red sandstone is interposed, the two strips converging at Râs Mohammed, the southern promontory of the whole. Sinai, naked and bare, is a distinctly marked summit of this granitic range, whose strong red colouring lends a richness to the whole mountain landscape which distinguishes it from the mountain scenery of all other lands.

Grandeur and desolation are the great features of the scenery. Sinai, according to Robertson, is the modern Horeb of the monks, forming the north-west and lower face of the Jebal Musa, and crowned with a range of magnificent cliffs, the highest point, called Râs Susâfeh, or Sufsâfeh, overlooking the plain Er Rahah. This Jebal Musa is, comparatively with adjacent mountains, insignificant. The great feature of the site is the conjunction of mountain with plain.

Jebal Musa, the Mountain of Moses, has been by the most trustworthy travellers supposed hitherto to be the Sinai which Moses ascended, and where God came down in fire and in thick darkness to speak to His servant, and to deliver, amidst the most awful and significant portents,

the moral, the ceremonial, and the judicial law. Below, in the solitude of this desert mountain-region, shut in on every side by mighty walls of rock and perpendicular cliffs, far from fair cities and fruitful plains, the people were encamped, waiting the revelation of the divine power and glory. The awful grandeur of this manifestation of God in the wilderness is again and again referred to in the Old Testament in passages of the sublimest imagery. "Lord, when Thou wentest out of Seir, when Thou marchedst out of the field of Edom, the earth trembled, and the heavens dropped; the clouds also dropped water, the mountains melted from before the Lord, even that Sinai from before the Lord God of Israel." "O God, when Thou wentest forth before Thy people, when Thou didst march through the wilderness, the earth shook, the heavens dropped at the presence of God; even Sinai itself was moved at the presence of God, the God of Israel." "The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels; the Lord is among them as in Sinai, in the holy place." "He bowed the heavens also, and came down: and darkness was under His feet—and He rode upon a cherub and

did fly; yea, He did fly upon the wings of the wind: He made darkness His secret place; His pavilions round about Him were dark waters, and thick clouds of the skies."

Let us recall that scene before the Mount after God had revealed His purpose of coming down and of manifesting His glory. The people were told that on the morning of the third day the Lord would descend in their sight upon Sinai, and they were to make ready for the vision of Jehovah.

The three intervening days were to be employed in solemn preparation for His appearing. They were to sanctify themselves, to separate themselves to God, to wash their clothes, and set bounds around the Mount, over which neither people nor priest were to pass, on peril of death. They were not even to touch the border of it; for whosoever touched the Mount was to perish on the instant. "There shall not a hand touch it, but he shall surely be stoned, or shot through; whether it be beast or man, it shall not live: when the trumpet soundeth long, they shall come up to the Mount." That was a solemn interval, during which the people were preparing themselves for the revela-

tion of the Holy God "who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity," and who will not all acquit the guilty. One thought would fill every heart and occupy every mind, and it would be with a mysterious dread that they sought to purify themselves against the Lord's approach. It may be that in after-years the Psalmist had this solemn scene in his mind when he asked the question, "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord, or who shall stand in His holy place? He that hath clean hands and a pure heart, who hath not lifted up his soul to vanity, nor sworn deceitfully."

When at length the morning of the third day dawns upon the vast encampment, every eye amongst the moving multitude turns in suspense and wondering awe to Sinai. Very soon they see dense black clouds veiling the mountain; then comes the bright lightning-flash, followed by the crash of the pealing thunder; then is heard the sound of a trumpet long and loud streaming through the air, and sent back in a thousand echoes from the surrounding hills, so that all the people are filled with fear. The Lord descends in fire: the mountain seems all aflame, and the smoke goes up

like the smoke of a furnace, and the mountain trembles greatly. Out of the midst of the fire, of the cloud, and of the thick darkness, comes a great voice—the voice of God speaking to the people, and delivering that moral law which is of universal and unchanging obligation. Clearer and louder than the thunder which shakes the heights of Sinai comes that voice upon the ears of the people, declaring by means of precepts, short but comprehensive, the glorious holiness of the Lord their God. And the effect upon their minds is such as neither sound of thunder, nor earthquake, nor trumpet have been able to produce. So long as God keeps silence they listen, though amid much fear and trembling; but now that they hear God speaking out of the midst of the fire, they cannot endure the terror of His voice, and they appeal unto Moses with the imploring cry, “Speak thou with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die.” It appears that this request was granted, and that nothing of the revelation on Sinai was heard by all the people save the Moral Law, or Ten Commandments. The people, after the delivery of the Decalogue, retired further and further from the Mount; but

Moses, calm and tranquil amidst all the terrors of the scene, “drew near unto the thick darkness where God was.” He was lost to the vision of the people below; a cloud had received him out of their sight, and there, as he was alone with the great and dreadful God, “the Lord spake unto him face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend.”

To Moses alone Jehovah then gave the particulars of that judicial or civil law which was specially adapted to the temper and circumstances of the Israelites, and calculated to guard their faith in the Theocratic character of the dispensation. It relates to persons—to the laws about husband and wife, father and son, master and slave—to the stranger—to laws about land and property—to laws of debt, taxation, and tithe—to poor laws, and maintenance of priests—to criminal offences, to constitutional laws, to the local judges, the royal power, and the royal revenue.

When Moses had received this civil law, he returned to the camp, and rehearsing in the ears of the people what God had spoken, he obtained from them a solemn promise that all the words which the Lord had said they would do. He then offered burnt-offerings and peace-offerings unto the

Lord, gathering half of the blood of the sacrifice into basins, and sprinkling half on the altar. Then he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people, and they said, "All that the Lord hath said will we do," and be obedient. And Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord hath made with you concerning all these words." After this solemn ceremony was concluded, he again ascended the mount, taking with him Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel. And now what a spectacle met their gaze! "They saw the God of Israel; and there was under His feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in its clearness." For six days the glory of the Lord abode upon Sinai, and the cloud covered the mount; and on the seventh day Moses, leaving the elders of Israel below, went up alone into the midst of the cloud, and was in the mount forty days and forty nights. And now God delivers to His servant the whole of the ceremonial or ecclesiastical law, the law of sacrifices and offerings, and gives into his hands two tables of testimony, tables of stone, containing

the Moral Law written with His own divine finger, to show its everlasting obligation. Such are the particulars of the solemn scene on Mount Sinai. Let us now seek to gather from it some lessons which may be profitable for our instruction in righteousness.

The first lesson is the glory of the Moral Law. Surely that must be a glorious code which forms a transcript of the mind of Jehovah, and which exhibits the purity, the holiness, the wisdom, the justice of the great and dreadful God. The law is the revelation of God's mind, it is the mirror in which is glassed His hatred and abhorrence of sin. It is constructed on the principles of unmitigated justice, and being given, as it was, by God himself, and amidst the most sublime manifestations of His majesty, we cannot be surprised that He who came to fulfil it, who is "the End of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth," should say, "It is easier for heaven and earth to pass than for one tittle of the law to fail."

This law comes to us stamped with the impress of Jehovah's absolute perfections, and is like Himself, "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." Now this law is called by St Paul

“the letter that killeth,” “the ministration of death;” and its very glory—for he says it was glorious—seems to be that it condemns the transgressor. By the law we are all guilty before God. Come and let us reason together. “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.” Under this curse we come. For who is there that can lift up his face to God, and say, This heart, these hands are clear from sin, “the whole law have I kept from my youth up”? Is there one amongst us who can affirm that he has never been guilty of doing what he ought not to have done, or never guilty of not doing what he ought to have done? Which of you is so happy, so truly to be envied, as, taking a review of the time since he was a child, to feel no pang of remorse for word, or work, or wish of days gone by? If you were to live your life all over again, would you be exactly the same man or woman that you have been? Would you repeat in every detail the past, and walk in the old paths with the satisfied feeling that the course which you ran was not capable of being improved? Is there no one, living or dead, to whom you might have behaved more kindly, more justly, more truly?

As the memory of the old home comes back, and you people it with the familiar faces—the mother, so tender in her anxious love—the father, who fondly watched over your dawning youth—the brother or the sister, or the companion with whom you played—the friends who are now passed from earth, does no painful thought mingle with your other recollections? Does no passionate wish arise that some speech could be unsaid, some action could be undone? Oh! there is not one of us who may not “write bitter things” against ourselves, and who, looking back on the comparatively innocent days of childhood, may not utter the prayer of the Psalmist, “Lord, remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions.” And if we pass from childhood to our riper years, what shall we say of them? Have we not to confess “that our trespass is grown into the heavens; that our iniquities are more in number than the hairs of our head; that they are as a heavy burden, too heavy for us to bear? Oh, how the sins of the past come trooping up before the mind! Indeed, there seem little else but sin. Sin everywhere, and in everything. Sin in what we thought holy service. We have fallen before temptation; we have yielded to

the voice of passion ; we have indulged in evil, knowing it to be evil ; we have resisted conscience, and followed, to the grieving of the Spirit, the wounding of the Saviour, the neglect of God, the desires and devices of our own hearts. These things we have done, and because of these we are deserving of the righteous anger of God. If “ he that offendeth in one point is guilty of all, how deeply, doubly guilty are we, who have offended not in “ one point,” but in ten thousand points of the law ! Is there, then, any hope for us from the law ? Hope ! none—not a ray. By the law hope is excluded ; despair must wrap every soul of man in its dark and dreary pall, if we are to be acquitted or condemned by the sentence of that law which we have broken from our youth up until now. “ Wherefore then serveth the law ? ” It is “ a schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ,” to “ shut us up unto Christ.” It is intended to convince us that our only hope lieth in Him who hath “ redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us ; ” for it is written, “ Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.”

“ The law is good if a man use it lawfully ; ” “ is good,” if not seeking life through obedience to its

requirements; we are constrained by its condemning voice to “flee for refuge to the hope set before us in the gospel.” “For God sent forth His Son made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.” Nor do we make void the law through faith. God forbid!—yea, we establish the law. Christ, by obeying the injunctions of the law in His life, and by suffering the penalties of the law in His death, “has magnified the law, and made it honourable,” — “In Him mercy and truth have met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other.”

Has the law led us to Christ as its substance and fulfilment? and in Him have we found acceptance—even in Him “whom God hath sent forth to be a propitiation, through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past,” through the forbearance of God, that He might be just, and the justifier of them “that believe in Jesus?” If so, then we can go on our way rejoicing, because we are no longer “under the law, but under grace,” and because delivered from “the spirit of bondage again to fear, we have

received the Spirit of adoption whereby we can cry, Abba, Father."

But a second lesson to be learned from Sinai is the deep depravity of man. I know of no fact more eloquent of this truth than the conduct of the people during part of the time that Moses was on the mount with God. We read in Exodus xxxii. that even while the mountain trembled and the thunder rolled and the lightnings flashed—even while the echo of Jehovah's voice still lingered on the air, and the fear which awed their minds and shook their hearts had hardly subsided, the Israelites gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, "Up, make us gods, that shall go before us; for as for this man, that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him." And then we read that by the advice of Aaron they brake off the golden ear-rings which were in the ears of their wives, of their sons, and of their daughters, and he receiving them at their hands smelted them in the fire, and "fashioned the metal with a graving tool after he had made it into a molten calf."

In the absence of Moses, and clinging to some

visible object of worship, they formed a calf, that it might represent the "Elohim," or gods which brought Israel out of Egypt. Whether they fell back upon the remembrance of some Egyptian idol, or adopted a well-understood cherubic symbol, when they "likened their Maker to the graven ox," is not said; the sin was the same—the worship of that which their own hands had made.

When the people saw the calf, they shouted, "These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt!" "And when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation before it, and said, To-morrow is a feast to the Lord. And they rose up early in the morning, and offered up burnt-offerings, and brought peace-offerings; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play."

Now, can anything teach us more impressively the thorough sinfulness of human nature? Truly "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." Who that looks upon this shameful scene can deny that man has fallen, that he "is very far gone from original righteousness?" Let those who can eloquently advocate the dignity of human nature, its grandeur and goodness, cast

their eyes on that scene which is passing at the foot of Sinai, and behold a practical refutation of their theories. Will they not be constrained to exclaim, "How is the gold become dim! how is the most fine gold changed!" By the light of those burnt-offerings which they offer to the molten calf, we see the fallen and dark heart of man always prone to depart from the living God; and I think there is no further argument needed to prove how far man has fallen, than the one furnished here by the conduct of the Hebrew people. Glance again at those frantic dancers, and that image of gold; hear the reckless and profane laughter of the people who have made themselves naked to their shame among their enemies, as they perform their unhallowed rites, and offer sacrifice to the idol which their own hands have made. It is not the dark and degraded idolater that you behold there—the man who has never heard of God, and who only sees a deity in the clouds, and hears Him in the winds; but it is Aaron, Israel's high priest, who had gazed on the glory of God; it is the people of the Lord, who lately heard Jehovah's voice out of the midst of the fire, and on whose ear had fallen

the solemn words, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me," who are worshipping a golden calf, and saying of it, "These be thy gods, O Israel, which have brought thee up out of the land of Egypt!"

Brethren, let us learn from this scene the evil of our hearts, and our danger of falling even into the grossest sin if left to ourselves. It is well ever to bear in mind our own weakness, ever to be alive to the truth that our only security against sin is that divine grace which alone can keep us back from "presumptuous sins." Law will not do it; judgment will not do it; terror will not do it; nothing but the grace—the restraining grace of God. In our state and condition there is much that exposes us to temptation from the world, the flesh, and the devil, our three watchful, wakeful, sleepless adversaries. And though we may think that we are far removed from the possibility of sinning after the manner of Israel in the matter of the golden calf; and though for any one who should hint at the possibility we have the ready answer, "Is thy servant a dog, that he should do such a thing?" let us remember that St Paul thought it not out of place to set the wickedness of the

Israelites as a beacon-light before the Christian Church. "Now these things were our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. Neither be ye idolaters as were some of them: as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play; neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. Now all these things happened unto them for examples; and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." Let us never forget that "covetousness is idolatry," and let us take heed to the words with which the apostle of love closes his first epistle—"Little children, keep yourselves from idols."

But another lesson to be learnt from Sinai is the contrast between the law and the gospel. The law was accompanied by the roll of the thunder and the flash of the lightning; the gospel was ushered in by the light of angels' wings and the music of angels' songs, and was heralded by the calm lustre of a peaceful star. Clouds and darkness are the attributes of the one; joy and glory

are the handmaidens of the other. The law saith, "The soul that sinneth it shall die;" the gospel says, "He that believeth shall live." The law wounds; the gospel heals. The law speaks of a curse entailed; the gospel speaks of a curse removed. The law proclaims God to be just; the gospel proclaims Him to be just and the justifier." The law holds forth no promises; the gospel breathes the very richest, and crowds the present and the future with blessings—lays open a world thronged with such a happiness and glory "that the eye hath not seen nor the ear heard, neither hath it entered the heart of man to conceive them." Therefore do we say with the Apostle Paul, "If the ministration of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not steadfastly behold the face of Moses, which glory was to be done away, how shall not the ministration of the Spirit be rather glorious?" Oh yes; the gospel excels the law in glory as much as life excels death, and a blessing excels a curse, and heaven excels hell.

Men and brethren, this is the gospel which is preached unto you. And oh! how we ought to adore the grace of God who has brought

us under its joyful sound, through whose mercy the gladdening tidings have fallen upon our ears, that "Christ has made an end of sin and brought in an everlasting righteousness," which is "unto all, and upon all them that believe."

Yes, this is the glory of the gospel, that it reveals a Saviour who can satisfy every desire of the craving heart of man. There is not a want that you have or can have for which you will not find in Christ a rich and abundant supply. I promise you that if you come to Him bringing the hunger and thirst of your needy souls, He will not "send you empty away."

"A way He is to lost ones that have strayed ;
A robe He is to such as naked be :
Is any hungry ? to all such He is bread,
Is any weak, in Him how strong is He !
To him that's dead He's life ; to sick men health,
Eyes to the blind, and to the poor man wealth."

Oh, my brethren ! this gospel preaches to us of sin forgiven and transgression blotted out, of guilt made an end of, and iniquity buried fathoms deep in the depths of the sea.

It has words in season for all : it promises rest to the weary, and hope to the desponding, and peace to the troubled ; and we have only to embrace it, and receive its offers of mercy, and all its rich

and boundless blessings shall be our own. It can do for us what nothing else in the world can do ; what neither riches, nor rank, nor pleasure, nor friends can do ; it can give us calmness in trial, peace in the hour of death, and boldness in the day of judgment.

Oh, when that solemn time comes, in the which our strength shall be brought low ; when the wasting disease feeds on the life ; when the heart sinks, and the pulse flutters, and sight is failing, then shall the full preciousness of the gospel be felt and realised. Wife, or sister, or friend, may bend fondly over us, and wipe the death-sweat from the brow, or moisten the fevered lips, or smooth the ruffled pillow ; words of comfort may they whisper in the ear, but it will be beyond them to support the sinking soul, or deliver it from the dread of the last enemy, or give us an abundant entrance into the kingdom of heaven. All they can do, they will, and gladly do ; but it is beyond their power to take the sting from death, or rob the grave of its victory ; or to supply us with “the rod and the staff,” which shall “comfort us in the valley of the shadow of death.” But this the gospel can do, and does. It reveals to us a good

Shepherd, who walks with us every step of the way; whispers comfort to our soul; and even in that hour when heart and flesh fail, “makes us more than conquerors,” and gives us the eternal God for our Refuge, and places beneath us “the Everlasting Arms.” So that Sinai, with all its terrors, if it drives us to Calvary with all its grace, is one of “the hills that bring peace.” And if such be the blessings which the gospel gives, then with Mary, the mother of Jesus, we will say, “My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour: for He that is mighty hath done great things for me, and holy is His name.” Yea, we will take into our mouth the angels’ song, as they filled the skies with music on the birthnight of the child Jesus, and with them we will sing—

“Glory to God in the highest, and on
Earth peace, good will to men.”

H O R,
THE MOUNTAIN OF DEATH.

VI.

H O R.

“Take Aaron and Eleazer his son, and bring them up unto Mount Hor; and strip Aaron of his garments, and put them upon Eleazer his son: and Aaron shall be gathered unto his people, and shall die there.”—NUM. XX, 25, 26.

THE mountain we are to climb this evening, is Mount Hor. Mount Hor forms one of the chain of mountains, called in Scripture, “the mountains of Seir,” which extend from the plain of the Dead Sea to the top of the gulf of Akaba. This whole range, which separates Arabia Petrea from the eastern deserts, is formed of new red sandstone, and is remarkable for its peculiar colour, that of a dull crimson or purple. Seir is in the land of Idumea, or Edom; and Petra, the mysterious capital of the Edomites, lies under the gigantic shadows of “the mountain of Aaron,” as Hor is still called, Hor being the highest elevation of the chain, from whose lofty peaks Sinai can be seen lying away nearly 150 miles to the south. You

will remember that Seir, the pride and glory of Edom, was given by God to Esau as a possession, and that afterwards it was smitten in its length and breadth by the curse of God, and its fertile plains turned into a desolation, made the home of the cormorant and the bittern, the owl and the raven, because of the wickedness of its inhabitants. The doom of Idumea is written in the 34th chapter of the Prophet Isaiah.

As the children of Israel journeyed on their way to Canaan, they came to the wilderness of Zin, and abode for a time in Kadesh. When they were about to depart from this place, Moses sent messengers to the king of Edom, with the prayer that he would grant them the liberty of marching through his country, promising that they would "not enter the fields, or into the vineyards, or drink of the water of the wells: that they would go by the king's highway, turning neither to the right hand nor to the left, until they had passed his border." The king, however, refused to give the Hebrews passage through his country, "and came out against them with much people, and with a strong hand, wherefore the Israelites turned away from him, and journeyed from Kadesh, and came

unto Mount Hor." It was on this, the highest and most conspicuous of the whole range of the crimson mountains of Edom, that Aaron was gathered to his fathers. Hor, a mountain marked far and near by its double top, which rises like a huge castellated building from a lower base, is 4800 feet above the Mediterranean, 1700 feet above the wondrous city of Petra once so famous, 4000 above the level of the deep sunken valley of the Arabah, and more than 6000 above the Dead Sea. Here, on the purple crags of Mount Hor, Israel's first high priest died, and on its rugged summit was his grave dug. "Take Aaron and Eleazer his son," was the solemn command of God, "and bring them unto Mount Hor, and strip them of their garments, and put them upon Eleazer his son: and Aaron shall be gathered unto his people, and he shall die there."

Before we go up with Aaron to Hor, and witness his death, let us glance at some points in his history, "which may be profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."

Aaron was the elder brother of Moses. He must have been a man of great devotion and purity of character, as well as of rare mental

gifts, seeing that he was associated with Moses in the solemn work of delivering the Israelites from their oppressive bondage under Pharaoh, and of leading them through the wilderness to the Promised Land. When Moses shrank from the thought of appearing at the court of Egypt, and before its cruel king, because he was not eloquent, but rude of speech and of a slow tongue, God met the objection by saying,—“Is not Aaron, the Levite, thy brother? I know that he can speak well—and thou shalt speak to him, and put words in his mouth; and I will be with thy mouth, and with his mouth, and will teach you what ye shall do. And he shall be thy spokesman unto the people; and he shall be, even he shall be to thee instead of a mouth, and thou shalt be to him instead of God.” Aaron, too, was a man of such mark, such nobility of mind, and dignity of demeanour, that he was chosen to be the founder of the Jewish Priesthood, and was the first that was set apart to minister at the altar of God. He was the representative of that sacerdotal office which was the great feature of the Levitical dispensation, and which continued without intermission, until Christ came to fulfil it in His own

Person—that office, the duties of which consisted in daily ministrations in the temple, and in “offering both gifts and sacrifices for sins.” After the giving of the Law, Aaron was solemnly consecrated and set apart to the priesthood; he was anointed with the holy oil, and invested with the sacred robes; he was clothed with the breastplate, and the ephod, and the linen garments; he was given the mitre, and the girdle; on his heart, he carried the Urim and Thummim, with its twelve brilliant oracular gems; and on his forehead he wore the golden plate, graven with the words, “Holiness to the Lord.” Thus arrayed in garments of glory and beauty, he ministered in the Presence of the Lord; appeared at special times before the mysterious Shekinah; offered up daily sacrifices; made daily intercessions; went once every year into the Holy of Holies to make atonement for himself and for the sins of the people; and performed all those rites and ceremonies which were imposed on the Jews, “until the time of reformation.” For in all these solemn acts of worship, Aaron and his successors were but types; types of “the great High Priest of our profession, who has passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of

God," and who "ever liveth to make intercession for His people." The importance of the Aaronic priesthood lay wholly in its typical character. It had no value save in so far as it directed the eye of the worshipper to the death of Christ on Calvary, and the life of Christ in heaven, and pointed to the office and work of Him, who, having suffered once for all upon the cross, now ever stands within the veil, in the Holy of Holies, pleading ceaselessly on our behalf. All the laws about the priesthood, all the ritual of the tabernacle and the temple, "were but shadows of good things to come, and could never make them that did the service perfect as pertaining to the conscience." From brazen altar and from bleeding lamb, from golden censer, from meat-offering and drink-offering and peace-offering, came so many voices, all crying in the ears of the believing Jew, "We are not your atonement, we are not your expiation:" "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." And that which was proclaimed to the Old Testament believer through each and every ordinance of the Mosaic law, is now announced in every promise of that gospel of glad tidings, which is the "wisdom

of God, and the power of God unto salvation." There is no further need on earth of bleeding sacrifice or mediating priesthood; the one Oblation has been offered: the great High Priest has carried His own blood into the holy places not made with hands. Aaron and his sons have no successors in their office; for when the triumphant words, "It is finished," burst from the lips of the Saviour upon Calvary, they rang the death knell of the old Levitical economy. The shadows have given way to the substance. "The law came by Moses, but grace and truth by Jesus Christ."

There is more than one passage in Aaron's life which furnishes us with instructive lessons. However exalted he was in respect to his office, he was far from being perfect as a man. We have seen on a former occasion how grievously he sinned in the matter of the golden calf. When the people, weary of waiting for the descent of Moses from the mount, gathered themselves tumultuously round Aaron, and called upon him to make them gods which should go before them, instead of rebuking at once a request so sinful and foolish, he suggested the formation of a molten image; and when it was fashioned, he

reared an altar before it, and offered upon it burnt-offerings and peace-offerings. We are astonished at such an outrage against piety and common sense. With the echoes of Sinai sounding in his ears; at the foot of that awful mountain, where the God of Israel had appeared in fire, and from which the voice had come—"Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image," Aaron fashions the senseless idol, and bows down and worships it. And having thus given place to the devil, he adds sin to sin! Falsehood follows on the heels of impiety. Moses descends Sinai after communion with God, and where he has just heard from the Divine lips the sin of Aaron and the people. In his descent a shout strikes in the ears of himself and Joshua, who says—"There is a noise of war in the camp." But Moses answers, "It is not the voice of them that shout for mastery, neither is it the voice of them that cry for being overcome, but the voice of them that sing do I hear." As they draw near the camp, suddenly the whole shameful and degrading scene bursts on their view—the golden calf, the frantic dancers, the idolatrous worship—and Moses, in an impulse of indignant anger, throws down the tables of stone, and

dashes them in pieces beneath the mount. Approaching his brother he asks in a voice thrilling with angry emotion—"What did this people unto thee that thou hast brought so great a sin upon them?" Aaron pointed an accusing finger to the camp, and answered—"Thou knowest the people, that they are set on mischief. For they said, 'Make us gods, which shall go before us: for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him.' And I said unto them, Whosoever hath any gold, let them break it off. So they gave it me: then I cast it into the fire, and there came out this calf." He attempts to screen himself by a subterfuge, and to extenuate his guilt by an excuse which sounds marvellously like a lie. As to his taking a graving tool and fashioning the metal into a molten image, not a word about that. No! "I cast the gold into the fire, and there came out this calf." It was a sad fall altogether, and it is recorded for our admonition. Let us lay it to heart. The falls of good men should make us ever watchful against sin, and keep us very near to God; yea, should bring us often to our knees with the prayer—"Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

Nor was this, by any means, the only sin of which Aaron was guilty. Fired with the contemptible passion of jealousy against his brother, in the pride of his heart he would have brought contempt on the office and authority of Moses. He and Miriam spake against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married: and they said, "Hath the Lord indeed spoken only by Moses? Hath he not also spoken by us?" God took notice of this sin, and punished it.

Nor must it be forgotten that at the "Waters of Strife," Aaron was betrayed along with Moses into sins of presumption and anger. The congregation of Israel gathered before the rock in Kadesh, expecting, as on a former occasion in Horeb, to see the waters gushing from the stone under the smiting of the rod. And how are they addressed by Moses and Aaron? "Hear now, ye rebels, must we fetch you water out of this rock?" They sought to magnify themselves in the sight of the people, and instead of giving all the glory to God, would have fain made it appear that the power of bringing forth water from the rock lay entirely on their own heads—"Must *we* fetch you water out of this rock?"

There are two remarks that I must make, arising out of this part of my subject. The first is, we are not to judge of a man's character by single acts. It is the general tenor of the life which in reality proves what the man is. Noah planted a vineyard, and drank of the wine to excess, yet you would not on this account rank him with the drunkards. David fell grievously, and suffered for it, and was recovered from his fall, but he is not to be classed among the adulterers and murderers of the world—murderer and adulterer as he undoubtedly was—because he sinned with Bathsheba, and killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword. Peter, yielding to the force of a sudden temptation, to his shame and sorrow, denied his Lord, even with oaths and curses, and yet no one would place his name on the roll of blasphemers, or apostates from the faith. Nor, on the other hand, because a wicked man may happen to perform some acts which are deserving of praise, would you say that he merits a place amongst the saintly and the pure. In the life of Saul, king of Israel, you will find some things to applaud, traits of nobleness, and acts of justice and genero-

sity; but who, for the sake of these, would ever dream of ranking him with the holy and the good. You must judge of a man by the general character of his life, and when you hear that a child of God has been unhappily betrayed into sin, do not, on that account, regard him as one who has "never tasted of the heavenly gift;" rather hope and pray that he may rise from his fall, and be restored to the good Shepherd's fold. Do not triumph over the fallen; do not crush them down lower; deal gently with them, and see that ye act upon the counsel of the apostle—"Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such a one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted."

My other remark is, that God will not tolerate sin in His people.

The sins of those whom He has called to a knowledge of Himself are worse—far worse in His eyes—than the sins of other men, and He ever visits these severely. He will not smile on His children sinning. After the sin at the "Waters of Strife," the Lord spake on this wise in the ears of Moses and Aaron—"Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel,

therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them." There is a remarkable expression in the eighth verse of the ninety-ninth Psalm. We learn from it that though God freely pardons the sins of His children, He chastens them when they offend. Speaking of the Israelites, David says, "Thou wast a God who forgavest them, though Thou tookest vengeance on their inventions." Be sure, a pardoned man though you be, that you cannot sin with impunity. Be very sure, an accepted child as you are, that suffering is the unvarying consequence of sin, nay, that chastisement is a proof that you are not a bastard, but a son. Not—and I would insist upon this—that there is anything judicially punitive in God's chastisement of His children, it is rather corrective; it is as St Paul says, "for our profit, that we may be partakers of God's holiness." In Christ, our sins have been judicially punished. "He bore our griefs, and carried our sorrows. The chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed." The rod of correction which God lays on the shoulders of His own people is a rod of love; and because our heavenly Father is as wise as He is tender, in

very pity He makes sorrow to follow upon sin. A weak and foolish parent may sacrifice the interests, and peril the happiness of his children, by "sparing the rod;" but God, in His gracious wisdom, consults better for the members of His family, and chastens us in time, that we may be saved in eternity.

I have spoken of the blemishes in Aaron's character. Let us now look at its graces.

During that weary journey through the wilderness, his faith, his patience, his hope, his obedience, were often brightly exemplified. We find much, on several occasions, to admire in his conduct. Let us advance to one proof of this. Aaron had four sons who were consecrated with himself to the solemn duties of the priesthood. Nadab and Abihu, the two eldest of these, committed a grievous sin. God had commanded that the incense, offered on the day of atonement, should be kindled at that ever-burning fire which fell from heaven to consume the earliest victims which were offered on the altar of the Lord. Every other fire was forbidden. But these two men, either through ignorance or carelessness, perhaps in their pride and presumption, took strange fire—fire that was not appointed, took it

not from the altar of burnt-offering, but from some other source—it is supposed from under the peace-offering. The anger of God was immediately kindled against them for this wanton act of disobedience—for will-worship was not allowed—God will be obeyed. So fire went out from the Lord and devoured them, and they died before the Lord. Now, the deliberate sin of his sons and its instantaneous punishment must have been a sore trial—a grievous affliction to Aaron. Who can picture the anguish of the father as he gazed on the dead bodies of his two sons, smitten by the avenging hand of God, cut off in their sins, stretched suddenly lifeless at his feet! It was a fearful trial. The agony of the father's heart must have been almost greater than he could bear. Yet, mark his uncomplaining resignation to the will of God. In the midst of his anguish Moses approaches, and says, "This is it that the Lord spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified." This was to tell Aaron that his sons had died for their sins. And what says he in reply? Nothing. He is dumb; he opens not his mouth. No answer, no word of complaint issues from his lips. One

brief but touching sentence sets before us Aaron's submission.

"Aaron held his peace." He bowed his head to the judgment. He may have felt as did that other Saint of old, when, through the mouth of the child Samuel, he heard God's judgment against his sons, and meekly replied, "It is the Lord, let Him do what seemeth Him good." Let us go, and do likewise. When the hand of God smites, let us bow submissively to the blow. Let us "be still, and know that He is God." "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Oh! when He who "does not afflict willingly"—who has no more pleasure in our sufferings than a father has in his children's tears—calls us to pass through dark depths of sorrow and suffering, let us, while we mourn, forbear to murmur, and seek to attain the sublime resignation of Aaron, who in the harrowing agony of a bereavement so terrible, "spake not, but held his peace."

There is a very touching incident connected with this judgment on Nadab and Abihu, which brings out in a beautiful manner the tender mercy of God. We find Aaron, submissive and resigned as he was, because of his sorrow, and

through not being permitted to show any outward sign of grief—not allowed to uncover his head, or to rend his clothes—sorely disturbed, and disquieted at heart. Forbidden to mourn, he had still to perform the duties of the priest's office, and to conduct the solemn and prescribed ritual of the tabernacle. So great was his grief, so filled were his thoughts with the startling visitation that fell on his two sons, that he inadvertently committed an error in the carrying out of the appointed ritual. A goat had been ordered as a sin-offering for the offence of his sons, and according to the Levitical law, the flesh of the sin-offering was commanded to be eaten by the priest beside the altar in the holy place. Moses, however, found upon inquiry that the goat had been burnt without the tabernacle, in place of being eaten according to law. Moses felt angry because of this, for the offence might have caused a repetition of the awful scene of the morning; and he remonstrated with Eleazar and Ithamar, the sons of Aaron—"Wherefore have ye not eaten the sin-offering in the holy ^{place} ~~place~~? Ye should have eaten it, in the holy place, as I commanded you." And then Aaron replies for his sons,

for he was chiefly to blame, and how pathetic are his words! There had been, he says, due attention paid to the services of the tabernacle. "Behold this day have they offered their sin-offering, and their burnt-offering before the Lord." And then he adds, all the deep grief of his heart welling up to his lips, in the broken words, "Such things have befallen me!" "Such things," indeed, for his two sons had been slain in the very commission of their sin, and he was forbidden to mourn. "Such things have befallen me!" His deep grief at the death of his sons must plead in excuse of the breach of ritual: he felt besides that he was not in a fitting mood, not collected enough in mind, to partake of the sacrifice. "If I had eaten the sin-offering to-day, should it have been accepted of the Lord?" Moses had nothing to say to this. "He was content," and inasmuch as Moses was acting all through on the direction of God, we may believe that God was satisfied too—"for He is merciful and gracious, long-suffering and of great goodness." Oh, the tenderness of our God! "He is touched with a feeling of our infirmities;" He knows that "though the Spirit may be willing, the flesh is weak." He will not

“break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax.” “As a father pitieth his own children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him.” “Such things have befallen me!” There is no blame,—no fault found on the part of Moses, who was in this the expression of the Divine Mind—the excuse of Aaron was sufficient. “Such things have befallen me!” “And when Moses heard that, he was content.”

But we now come to that scene in Aaron’s history which was more especially connected with Mount Hor. Aaron is to be gathered unto his people—the high priest is to resign his office in favour of his successor. And the Lord spoke unto Moses saying, “Take Aaron and Eleazar his son, and bring them up unto Mount Hor, and strip Aaron of his garments, and put them upon Eleazar his son, and Aaron shall be gathered unto his people, and shall die there.”

Imagine the two brothers and the son, as they leave the tents of Israel and climb the mountain slopes in the sight of all the congregation, whose straining eyes look for the last time on the form of one who was never to return. For Aaron goes to give up his life into the hands of God. He

ascends Hor to die ; to die apart from the tabernacle which he served, and from the people whom he loved. The sun may have been sinking in the west, flooding with rosy light the purple crags of Hor and the silent hills, as the appointed law-giver and the anointed priest of Israel and his son climb the mountain path, and toil slowly up the steep and rugged slopes which lead to the rocky platform at the summit. What unutterable thoughts fill their hearts, what farewell words fall from their lips, in that solemn hour, are not recorded. Indeed, their hearts may be too full to permit of their speaking. They may feel that silence is more congenial than words. Busy memory no doubt recalls to thought mutual joys and sorrows, mutual sins and sufferings, mutual hopes and fears : or faith may see deeper than ever before into the mysteries of the priesthood, and the altar, and the sacrifice ; and they may now muse and meditate on the substance of the shadows : and hope may grasp the future, and rejoice at the near approach of the glory to be revealed. At length their journey ends. The summit is reached—Aaron looks out upon the scene. Around him are the everlasting hills, beneath

him the Jordan and the glittering waters of the Dead Sea, and far away the white mountains of the wilderness they had long traversed and close around him the red and rugged mountains of Edom, and along the horizon the wilderness of Mount Seir. Such was the scene on which the eye of the aged priest must have rested. And now Moses strips Aaron of his priestly robes, and puts them on Eleazar, and when the solemn act of disrobing and of investiture has been accomplished, lo, as the brother and son gaze on the upturned face of the late high priest, the paleness of death overspreads it,—one last kindling look of faith and hope flashes from his eye, and Aaron's soul passes into the presence of his God.

There they left him to his rest on the mountain peak—with the mountain-glory around him, and the deep blue heaven above.

“And Moses and Eleazar came down from the mount, and when all the congregation saw that Aaron was dead, they mourned for Aaron even thirty days, even all the house of Israel.”

“Here we have a Hill which brings peace,” for Hor shows us how calm, how peaceful the man of God may be in death. “He that believeth shall

not make haste." Musing on that death-scene on Mount Hor, may we not say, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his." God grant that we may all be as well prepared for that solemn time when we shall be summoned to depart this life and to enter "the narrow house appointed for all living!" The hour must come when we shall lay aside the earthly house of this tabernacle—when we shall be unclothed—then, when the earthly raiment is stripped off, may we be invested in the garments of heaven; robed in the fine linen, clean and white, which is the righteousness of saints. But of all raiment, this shall be ours, if we are Christ's. "If we make it Christ to live, we shall find it gain to die."

Calm and self-possessed, we may meet the last enemy without fear; for the victory is ours. His sting is gone, his power broken; and we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. So that we may comfort the mourners who stand near our bed, with the words wherewith our Lord comforted His disciples when He was about to leave them, "If ye loved me, ye would rejoice because I go unto the Father." And they from whom we

are parted for a little while need not sorrow as others who have no hope. They may rather rejoice in our joy. They may thank God that we have "fallen asleep in Jesus." Yea, and when all is over, and the restless head is quiet, and the beating heart is still, and loving friends come to take a last, fond look, their grief may be soothed and their weeping hushed by the strong voice of faith, as some one calmer than the rest, and able to speak through tears, approaches the bed whereon we lie, and, bending over our lifeless form, whispers words full of the melody of heaven, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, for they rest from their labours; and their works do follow them."

NEBO,
THE MOUNTAIN OF BURIAL.

NEBO,

THE MOUNTAIN OF BURIAL.

“And the Lord spake unto Moses that self-same day, saying, Get thee up into this mountain Abarim, unto mount Nebo, which is in the land of Moab, that is over against Jericho ; and behold the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel for a possession ; and die in the mount whither thou goest up, and be gathered unto thy people ; as Aaron thy brother died in mount Hor, and was gathered unto his people.”—DEUT. xxxii. 48-50.

PISGAH is one of the mountains in the lofty range of Abarim, and Nebo is its most elevated and commanding peak. This sacred height lies on the east of Jordan, close by the field of Moab, and immediately opposite Jericho. Its position is denoted by the mention of the valley, or the ravine in which Moses was buried, and which was apparently one of the clefts of the mount itself—“the gorge in the land of Moab, facing Beth-peor.”

The wanderings of the Israelites were almost at an end. The generation that came out of Egypt, and had provoked God by their murmuring

and rebellion, had died in the terrible wilderness ; and their children stood on the banks of Jordan, waiting to cross its waters and to set foot on the promised land. There, on the other side of the river, stretched out before them the fair country “flowing with milk and honey,” rich in olive-yards and vineyards, a land of mountains and brooks, “a land which was the glory of all lands.” For forty years Moses had been the leader of the people who were shortly to go over and smite the Canaanites, and to take possession ; and during this weary time he had borne with their waywardness, ingratitude, and discontent. To his wisdom, and patience, and courage, it was due, under God, that one by one the obstacles had been cleared from their path ; that difficulties had been overcome and enemies been defeated ; “that mountains and hills had been made low, and valleys filled up ; that crooked things had been made straight, and rough places plain.” And now the long desired goal was in sight. The twelve tribes were in a little while to cross the Jordan, and driving out its possessors who had filled up the measure of their iniquities, were to make their own its rich heritage of fertile valleys and purple vineyards

and golden corn-fields; and to divide among themselves the fields and fountains which had been promised to "Abraham and Isaac and Jacob." All were to enter the longed-for Canaan—not one was to be left behind. He alone, the leader, the lawgiver, the prophet, he who had worked, and suffered, and wept, and prayed, was not to tread the soil which was to be the inheritance of his people. Aaron had died already in Mount Hor, for he had offended with Moses, and this first high priest of the people was not permitted to enter into Canaan, or to raise an altar there to Jehovah, or to offer a sacrifice in the land which in the coming years was to be consecrated by the atoning death of the Son of God. And now Moses, though he is allowed to approach nearer to the land—even to its borders, and to stand on its threshold—is also to be gathered to his fathers. The words had been spoken in his ears—"Get thee up into this mountain, and die in the mount, and be gathered unto thy people; as Aaron thy brother died in Mount Hor, and was gathered unto his people."

It is to this sentence of exclusion from the promised land that Moses so pathetically, so strik-

ingly alludes in the words—"Furthermore, the Lord was angry with me for your sakes, and sware that I should not go over Jordan, and that I should not go into that good land, which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance ; but I must die in this land, I must not go over Jordan ; but ye will go over, and possess that good land."

The first lesson I take from Mount Nebo is the righteous severity of God. "The Lord is of purer eyes than to look upon sin." See this truth in the words—"Thou shalt die in this land ; thou shalt not bring this congregation into the land that I have given them." Truly, "judgment beginneth at the house of God"—with His own people—"and though He forgiveth their iniquities, yet is He a God who taketh vengeance on their inventions." Of what sin had Moses been guilty that God should exclude him from Canaan, and refuse to allow His servant to pass over Jordan ? A momentary outburst of impatience it seems to us—an impulsive yielding to the promptings of unbelief—a few hasty words spoken unadvisedly with his lips—this was all. Yet see how God deals with sin, and if He thus deals with it, surely this must be our cry—"Enter not into judgment

with Thy servant, O Lord, for in Thy sight no man living shall be justified." Oh! "if God were extreme to mark what we have done amiss, who could abide it?"

Moses had offended at the waters of Meribah.

The people found themselves in want of water, as in their journeyings in the desert of Zin they came and pitched their camp in Kadesh. Instead of trusting in the God who had provided for the wants of their fathers, many years before, in Horeb, when Moses, by divine command, smote the rock, and the water leaped forth from the hard stone, "they gathered themselves together against Moses, and against Aaron. And they chode with Moses, and spake, saying, Would God that we had died when our brethren died before the Lord! And why have ye brought up the congregation of the Lord into this wilderness, that we and our cattle should die there? And wherefore have ye made us to come up out of Egypt, to bring us into this evil place? it is no place of seed, or of figs, or of vines, or of pomegranates; neither is there any water to drink."

Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the murmuring assembly, "unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and they fell upon

their faces before God: and the glory of the Lord appeared unto them. And the voice of the Lord was heard, saying, Take the rod, and gather thou the assembly together, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water, and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock: so thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink." At Horeb the rock was to be *smitten*, at Meribah the rock is to be *spoken* to. It is now that Moses greatly displeases God. "And Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock, and he said unto them, Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock? And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice; and the water came out abundantly; and the congregation drank, and their beasts also." Irritated and angry, Moses gives way to a burst of human passion, and breaks out into the impatient cry, "Hear now, ye rebels!" And then, as if the power to "turn the hard rock into a standing well" were in him and in his brother, and did not come directly from God, he asks, "Must we fetch you water out of this rock?" And then, as

though he did not believe that a word would be sufficient to call water from the stone, he smote the rock, not once, but in the heat of passion, lifting up his hand a second time, he smote it twice. The psalmist, in referring to this incident in the history of his nation, makes this comment on the arrogance, and passion, and unbelief of Moses—"They angered God also at the waters of strife, so that it went ill with Moses for their sakes: because they provoked his spirit, so that he spake unadvisedly with his lips." God was moved to anger by the sin of His servant, and faithful and obedient as Moses had been, He shows that He will not tolerate sin, even in those whom He regards with the most favour and approval. "And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them."

Brethren, let us learn in this sentence of exclusion from the promised land, passed on Moses and Aaron, God's hatred of sin, God's determination that it shall not pass unpunished—Therefore, "stand in awe, and sin not." "If

these things are done in the green tree, what will be done in the dry?" "If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" "If judgment thus begins at the house of God, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?" And let not only the sinner fear to offend Him who will "not at all acquit the guilty," and who has declared with the most solemn reiteration, that "the soul that sinneth, it shall die;" but let His own people fear to offend Him, lest through their sin they lose some blessed privilege which else had been theirs, or forfeit some joy which, but for this, had crowned their lives. Dread nothing so much as sin. Take alarm at the first evil thought, and crush the serpent in the egg. "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption." A careless walk, indulgence in some unmortified affection, the allowance of some uncrucified desire, will, as many of the Lord's people have found to their bitter cost, entail suffering; for sin and sorrow are welded together by adamantine chains, and cannot be put asunder.

Learn God's severity against sin by the way in

which He dealt with Moses ; read it in the command to His servant, as he stood on the very borders of the promised land, longing intensely to cross the Jordan, and yet forbidden. “ Get thee up into this mountain, and behold the land of Canaan and die in the mount whither thou goest up.”

But there was goodness as well as severity in this command of God to His sinning, but pardoned servant. Well might he say, “ My song shall be of mercy and judgment,” for the Lord who said to him, “ Get thee up into this mountain, and die in the mount whither thou goest up,” also graciously said, “ And behold the land of Canaan, which I give to the children of Israel for a possession.” Moses was not permitted to bring the congregation into the promised land—he was to die upon its borders ; but he was not to breathe out his soul into the hand of God, until, with eye divinely strengthened, he had looked on the rich valleys and hills which were to be the inheritance of Israel. And, accordingly, we are told that Moses “ went up from the plains of Moab into the mountain of Nebo, to the top of Pisgah ; and the Lord shewed him all the land of Gilead, and all Naphtali, and the land of Ephraim and Manas-

seh, and all the land of Judah unto the utmost sea, and the south, and the plain of the valley of Jericho, the city of palm-trees, unto Zoar." A glorious panorama! A magnificent prospect! Here the winding waters of Jordan; there the waving branches of the cedars of Lebanon. Here valleys standing thick with corn; there mountains clothed with flocks. Yonder the rich luxuriance of plains and olive-yards; and yonder the spreadings of vineyard, and river, and town, stretching over to the city of palm-trees, and the glittering waters of the farthest sea. And as the land lay before him in all its natural beauty—this "land of fountains and brooks, which was the glory of all lands"—his heart must have thrilled within him as the words of God fell upon his ear, "This is the land which I swear unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, saying, I will give it unto thy seed." For "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance," and despite all the sin and rebellion of the people, despite all the opposition of enemies, God, being mindful of this covenant, had determined to give the Israelites the land in possession; and here would He work out and accomplish the eternal purposes of His love.

And what were the feelings of Moses, as his eye took in all the glories of the landscape—the surpassing beauties of a country, where in future times such wonders were to be wrought, such prophecies to be accomplished, and such types to be fulfilled? How eagerly he had desired to be allowed to go over, and with his eyes to behold the covenanted possession! “I pray Thee,” he had cried to God, “I pray Thee, let me go over and see the good land that is beyond Jordan, that goodly mountain, and Lebanon.” And now, as he gazed on the landscape of Palestine, did he see with prophetic eye any of the wonders to be enacted there in future days? He had himself recorded the prediction: “There shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel.” He had foretold that “the sceptre should not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come.” He had spoken of another “prophet like unto himself, whom the Lord should raise up to His people.” May we not, therefore, believe that he was able to grasp many of those mysteries of redemption which were to be fulfilled in a land which should indeed be to all time “the Holy

Land;" because to be trodden by the feet, and blessed by the teachings, and sanctified by the death of One, in whom all the typical shadows of the law, and all the predictions of prophets were fulfilled?

And now, as he looked from the heights of Pisgah on the glorious scene spread out before him, did Bethlehem disclose any of its wonders to his vision? Did he catch the shining of the wondrous star that conducted to the cradle of the child Jesus the wise men from the east? Did there float on his opened ear an echo of the angels' song—"Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good-will towards men"? Did Nazareth come prominently into view, and the carpenter's shop, and the long years of lowly labour and silent preparation for the future ministry of sorrow, of suffering, of compassion, and of love? Was Jerusalem a chief object in the picture, with its temple, which Jesus purified, its streets where He taught, its garden where He agonised, its prætorium where He was mocked and falsely condemned, its Calvary where He was crucified? and did the loud cry of the dying Saviour come upon his ear, as saying, "It is finished!" He pro-

claimed the atonement made, and the types and shadows of the law fulfilled? Whether such a vision of the future was vouchsafed to Moses, is not revealed; but if it was given him to understand much, if not all, of the significance of the magnificent prospect on which he gazed, then mercy must have been mingled with judgment, and his soul must have been comforted by the gracious alleviation that attended the stern command, "Get thee up into this mountain," followed as it was by the words, "And behold the land of Caanan, and die in the mount whither thou goest up; and be gathered unto thy people."

Another lesson to be gathered from Mount Nebo is this: the certainty of a life beyond the grave. Was this lonely death upon the mount to be the end of such a noble career as that of Moses, the saint and servant of the Lord? Was this the reward and recompense of all his labours and all his toils? Was the great prophet's life to go out as a flickering flame, and die away in the darkness, leaving no trace behind? Was the last hour on Nebo indeed his last, and was there no other world where the grand existence might be resumed? Were the forty years at the court of

Pharaoh, the forty years in the Land of Midian, the forty years in the wilderness, to have no other compensation than a vision on Pisgah and a death on Nebo? Was he who communed with God to commune with Him no more? Was he who saw the God of heaven, and who bore upon his face the reflected glory of that sight, never to see Him again? Impossible! Not a man in the camp of Israel but must have felt it to be so. Not a man among the thousands in the congregation, who must not have believed that there was a land fairer than the land of promise, of which the land of promise was only the faint symbol, and into which Moses must have entered when he put off the earthly tabernacle, and breathed forth his soul in the hand of the Lord. Here the seeming failure of the life of Moses would be rectified. Here there would be compensation for the loss he sustained in his exclusion from the fair country of Caanan. And as Moses left the camp which his presence had so long blessed, and as the congregation, which he had led, and guided, and commanded for so many years, saw his retreating figure as he climbed Mount Nebo, there would rise up before their minds another world, where

there would be more than a recompense for any flaw or failure in the life of this man of God. It is an error to maintain that the Jews looked only to temporal promises, that their horizon was bounded by earth; such events as the translation of Enoch, the rapture of Elijah, and the death of Moses would assure them of the reality of another world, where there shall be a complete compensation for the disappointed hopes, the weary struggles, the bitter defects of the evil here—a world where “they that sow in tears shall reap in joy.” To us, thank God, all this has been made clear. The clouds which hung around the gate of death in the earlier dispensation have been dispersed since “the Sun of righteousness has arisen with healing on his wings.” Conjecture and speculation have now given place to certainty. “Life and immortality have been brought to light by the gospel.” “God has begotten us again to a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” Death has lost its sting, and the grave its victory. But still, whatever darkness rested upon a future state in the Old Testament, the death of such a man as Moses, after a life so spent as his had been, was full of immortal teachings to the

Hebrews, and there must have flashed upon their minds the glory of a completed life in a world beyond the grave, as they heard the command which God gave to His servant—"Get thee up to this mountain, and die in the mount whither thou goest up; and be gathered unto thy people."

Let us look at the solemn and mysterious close of the great prophet's life.

In the awful solitude of the mountain summit, on the lonely peak of Nebo, Moses died. There, with "eye undimmed, and natural strength unabated," and on the edge of the promised land, but not within it, he gave up his soul to God. There is a Jewish tradition that God drew out his soul with a kiss. Thus, amid the purple shadows of the rocks, with the mountain glory all around, and the fair beauty of that rare landscape lying before him, and the flash of sunlight over it all, and underneath the cloudless heaven, without a human friend near to grasp his hand, or to whisper words of comfort, Moses died. Died. Yet not without consolation, and was buried not without honour. No! though all Israel had met to weep and lament their dying hero; though the nation had assembled to pay a fitting tribute of

their love and sorrow—to light the funeral torch, and form the funeral train—they could have added nothing to the glory of that strange and lonely deathbed, or of that secret and mysterious burial, when his course finished, the mighty lawgiver fell asleep. For “the Lord buried him”—“buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, over against Beth-peor.” God himself—after He had “loosed the silver cord,” and “broke the golden bowl at the fountain”—hollowed out his grave, and composed his limbs, and laid him gently in the tomb. And still greater honour was in store for him. It is said “that no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day.” And how is this? For is not the very place where he was buried distinctly named? “A valley, or gorge, in the land of Moab, over against Beth-peor.” Why, then, is the grave unknown? The secrecy of the burial does not appear to me sufficiently explained by the conjecture, that God withheld from the Israelites the knowledge of the place where the great leader lay, lest it should become the shrine of superstition—an altar for idolatry. The place was sufficiently marked out for a false veneration, had the Israelites desired to offer it at the tomb—“a ravine

in the land of Moab, over against Beth-peor." I think his grave remained unknown, because his body was withdrawn from the tomb, and did not see corruption. It was withdrawn as soon as laid there, raised as soon as buried, the penalty of death reversed as soon as endured, the soul reunited to the body on the moment of its separation.

And may not this explain that obscure passage in the Epistle of St Jude, where it is said that "Michael, the archangel"—none other than Christ himself—"contending with the devil, disputed about the body of Moses." The devil may have claimed that Moses should endure the whole penalty of sin by the return of his body to the dust, and its submission to the law of corruption; for as yet the penalties of man's first transgression had not been exhausted on the cross; not as yet had the Saviour risen from the grave as the first-fruits of His people. The devil, therefore, who had the power of death, may have claimed the fulfilment of the curse—"Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return;" and Michael, the archangel, "which standeth for the children of his people," and who in after days

was to destroy the works of the devil, may have claimed, in virtue of the atonement to be offered and the resurrection to take place, the body of His dead servant, and declared it to be His will that it should be at once delivered from the humiliation of the tomb. We know that when Christ was transfigured on the mount, two shining forms appeared with Him in glory, and “spoke of the decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem.” These were Elijah and Moses. Elijah had been translated without seeing death, and Moses, who had died, reappeared in the very body he wore upon Nebo—the body which God himself buried and then raised, that it might stand with Christ on the mount of transfiguration. So Moses does actually at last stand within the borders of the promised land. Centuries after the prayer had been offered, that he might enter the earthly Canaan, he received the answer in an unexpected way, and was brought from his heavenly resting-place to stand side by side with Him whom all the types foreshadowed, and to whom all the prophets gave witness. Better that his prayer should be answered in this manner than according to his own desire; for, “appearing

in glory with Elijah," he, the mediator of the old dispensation, is permitted, along with its prophet, to speak with his Saviour of "His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem." Truly, our God knows how to answer prayer in the manner best for His people, and is "able to do exceeding abundantly for us above all that we can ask or think." So far of the death upon Nebo.

Those are fine lines in which a modern poetess sings of the burial of Moses—

"By Nebo's lonely mountain,
On this side Jordan's wave,
In a vale in the land of Moab,
There lies a lonely grave.
And no man dug that sepulchre,
And no man saw it e'er,
For the angels of God upturned the sod,
And laid the dead man there.

"That was the grandest funeral
That ever passed on earth ;
But no man heard the trampling,
Or saw the train go forth—
Noiselessly as the daylight
Comes when the night is done,
And the crimson streak on ocean's cheek
Fades in the setting sun.

"Noiselessly as the spring-time
Her crest of verdure waves,

And all the trees on all the hills
Open their thousand leaves ;
So without sound of music,
Or voice of them that wept,
Silently down from the mountain's crown
The great procession swept.

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“ This was the bravest warrior
That ever buckled sword ;
This the most gifted poet
That ever breathed a word ;
And never earth's philosopher
Traced with his golden pen,
On the deathless page truths half so sage,
As he wrote down for men.

“ And had he not high honour—
The hillside for a pall,
To lie in state, while angels wait
With stars for tapers tall,
And the dark rock pines, like tossing plumes,
Over his bier to wave,
And God's own hand in that lonely land
To lay him in the grave ?

“ In that deep grave without a name,
Whence his uncoffined clay
Shall break again, O wondrous thought !
Before the judgment-day,
And stand with glory wrapt around
On the hills he never trod,
And speak of the strife, that won our life,
With the incarnate Son of God.

“ O lonely tomb in Moab’s land !
O dark Beth-peor’s hill !
Speak to these curious hearts of ours,
And teach them to be still.
God hath His mysteries of grace,
Ways that we cannot tell ;
He hides them deep, like the hidden sleep
Of him He loved so well.”

Another thought, and I have done.

Moses, on the borders of Canaan, must resign the charge of the people to Joshua. He could not bring the people into the land, or give it them in possession. Moses was but the representative of the law—for “the law came by Moses,” and the law can never lead into heaven, the law can never be more than “a schoolmaster unto Christ.” Christ only can lead us over the borders of the land, and give it to us as our inheritance. Thus, as Bishop Hall says, “The very acts of God were allegories. Where the law ends, there the Saviour begins. We may see the land of promise in the law : only Jesus, the Mediator of the New Testament, can bring us into it.” Moses may guide, and teach, and discipline us during our pilgrimage in the wilderness, but it is only Joshua, our Jesus, Jehovah, our Saviour, who can lead us over

Jordan, and place us in that everlasting "rest which remaineth for the people of God." Let us learn this lesson from Nebo, and it shall be one of "the Hills that shall bring us peace." And, brethren, when the command reaches us, "Get thee up into this mountain, and die there," when every friend and companion must be left behind, and we pass down with God into the awful solitude of death, may we have Him with us who, when heart and flesh fail, will be "the strength of our heart, and our portion for ever." Whenever the dying hour overtakes us, may it find us living so close to Him, in whose sight "the death of His servants is precious," and to whom their very dust is dear, that, falling asleep in His arms, we shall awake up to be "satisfied with His likeness." So having passed through "the dark valley of the shadow of death," we shall find ourselves on "the mountain of spices" beyond, and in the glorious fruition of the paradise of God.

GILBOA,
THE MOUNTAIN OF DESPAIR.

VIII.

GILBOA.

“Ye mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew, neither let there be rain, upon you, nor fields of offerings; for there the shield of the mighty is vilely cast away, the shield of Saul, as though he had not been anointed with oil.”—2 SAM. i. 21.

GILBOA is a mountain range on the eastern side of the plain of Esdraelon, rising over the city of Jezreel. It extends in length some ten miles from west to east. The greatest height is not more than five or six hundred feet above the plain. It is only mentioned in Scripture in connection with one event in the history of Israel, the defeat and death of Saul and Jonathan by the Philistines. How beautiful, how pathetic the eulogium from which I have drawn the text for this present discourse! Did there ever well from the heart of the profoundest grief such another? Did ever genius throw the charm of such poetry over the death of the loved and the lost? Was

ever friend so mourned, or so lamented, as in that touching elegy, in which David pours out the sorrows of a bleeding heart! “And David lamented with this lamentation over Saul, and over Jonathan his son: The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places: how are the mighty fallen! Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon; lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph. Ye mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew, neither let there be rain, upon you, nor fields of offerings; for there the shield of the mighty is vilely cast away, the shield of Saul, as though he had not been anointed with oil. From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan turned not back, and the sword of Saul returned not empty. Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided: they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions. Ye daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you in scarlet, with other delights; who put on ornaments of gold upon your apparel. How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle! O Jonathan, thou wast slain

in thine high places. I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women. How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!"

Before speaking of this beautiful elegy, which the king and poet bade the Hebrew mothers teach their children, or attempting to justify its fitness in the case of one who perished so miserably by his own hand, I shall call your attention to some points in the life of Saul. It is amongst the saddest of Scripture stories. It begins brightly. It is like a morning without clouds, but ere long the mist gathers, and it closes in all the darkness of a night without a star.

The curtain in this tragedy rises upon a domestic scene. The drama opens in the house of Kish, a man of Benjamin, and the son of Abiel. Here we find Saul, son of this Benjamite, described as a choice young man and a goodly: and not among "the children of Israel was there a goodlier person than he: from his shoulders, and upwards, he was higher than any of the people." He is a youth of distinguished presence and noble stature, of great personal beauty, and remarkable

for activity and strength—"Swifter than the eagle, stronger than the lion." His moral qualities seem to harmonise with the grace and vigour of his outward frame. His humility and filial obedience, grown as he is to man's estate, and himself a father—the boy Jonathan having been, before this time, born in his house—are seen in the search after his father's asses which had gone astray on the mountains. When Kish speaks the word, "Take one of thy servants with thee, and arise, go seek the asses," he immediately obeys, and hastens forth with all speed to recover the drove that had been lost. His filial affection and his regard for his father's feelings are very tenderly indicated in the course of the narrative. Two days had been spent in a fruitless search, and on the third he said to his servant, "Come, and let us return, lest my father leave caring for the asses, and take thought of us." He feared lest his prolonged absence might create in his father's heart a dread for his safety, and that he might be filled with anxiety and alarm on his account. That he did not overestimate the affection with which Kish regarded him, is evident from the words of Samuel, after

he had anointed him, and was sending him on his way home, "When thou art departed from me to-day, then thou shalt find two men by Rachel's sepulchre, in the border of Benjamin, at Zelzah; and they will say unto thee, The asses which thou wentest to seek are found: and lo, thy father hath left the care of the asses, and sorroweth for you, saying, What shall I do for my son?" There must have been something winning, and attractive, and noble, in a son whose tender anxiety for his father was so great, and who had made himself so deep a place in that father's heart. These qualities seemed to insure a prosperous reign.

Let us turn to another scene in the history of Saul, one which reveals to us a character of true simplicity and of rare modesty. When Saul was in quest of his father's asses, he was found of Samuel, who had been previously instructed by God that a man should come out of the land of Benjamin, whom he should anoint to be captain over His people Israel, that He might save the people out of the hand of the Philistines. Samuel, so soon as his eyes fell on Saul, recognised in him Israel's future king, and declared in his ears the high

position to which he was destined. "On whom is all the desire of Israel? Is it not on thee, and on all thy father's house?" And is Saul elated at the prospect of this sudden elevation to so great an honour? Nay, not so. His answer to Samuel displays the greatest modesty and humility. "Am not I a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel? and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? Wherefore then speakest thou so to me?" And when he returned to his father's house, and the natural inquiry was made by his uncle, "Whither went ye? and what said Samuel unto you?" he told him "plainly that the asses were found. But of the matter of the kingdom, whereof Samuel spake, he told him not." There was no undue pride—no breaking forth of personal exultation that he, from among all the men of Israel, had been chosen by the Lord's prophet to fill the vacant throne. And when the day comes for his presentation to the people as their monarch, and the tribes assemble to hear him proclaimed king, withdrawing himself from the public gaze, and hiding "among the baggage," he shuns rather than courts the high honour which is thrust upon him by the divine

will. Nor must we overlook the magnanimous spirit which he displayed on the day of his public election to the crown. As he stood among the tribes, "higher than any, from his shoulders and upward," of goodly aspect, and of royal port, all the people shouted, and said, "God save the king!" The acclamation was not, however, unanimous. There were a few malcontents—envious men—who were no doubt jealous of his elevation to the throne—"children of Belial," who slightly asked, "How shall this man save us? And they despised him, and brought him no presents." But Saul generously overlooked the offence, and though a word from the lips of the king, crowned by the voice of the nation, might have brought on them the punishment they so well merited, yet "he held his peace." He soon shows that as in appearance he is every inch a king, so in action he is in very deed a brave man and bold warrior—one well fitted to go out before the people and fight their battles. Nahash, the Ammonite, encamped against Jabesh-Gilead, and the only condition on which he will make a truce with the alarmed inhabitants is this cruel one, that "he shall thrust out all their right eyes, and lay it for

a reproach on all Israel." The elders of Jabesh wish a respite of seven days, that they may send messengers unto all the coasts of Israel, and appeal to their countrymen for help. When the tidings reach Gibeah of Saul, and he hears the weeping of the people in their alarm and distress, his anger is greatly kindled, and making due preparations for battle, he places himself at the head of the army, and raising the war-cry, defeats the Ammonites, and puts them to flight. And now, when he has proved his valour, and shown that he *can* save the people—and some, proud of his victory, and jealous for his honour, urged him to take a bloody revenge on those who had doubted his fitness for the throne, saying, "Where is he that said, And shall Saul reign over us? Bring the men, that we may put them to death!"—what is the king's reply? This fine one, which showed the chivalrous spirit, the noble generosity of the man, "There shall not a man be put to death this day: for to-day the Lord hath wrought salvation in Israel." Nor are these goodly traits in his natural character all that was fair and promising in Saul. He had "tasted the powers of the world to come." Influences from a higher world had in

some measure been brought to bear upon him. "The Spirit of the Lord," we are told, "came upon him, and he prophesied," and "he was turned into another man." Again, it is said, God "gave him another heart;" and he became so different from his old self, that the change struck all the people, and they said one to another, "What is this that is come unto the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?"

I have thus looked at the character of Saul on its best and brightest side. I have brought out what was royal in his aspect, and generous in his nature. I have shown him to you humble and humane, high-minded and brave, and receiving direct impressions from a higher world. I have done so in order to impress upon you that, without the grace of God converting the heart, there is nothing in the goodly, kingly, generous traits of human nature to save a man from becoming both a moral and a spiritual wreck. Though Saul was changed into "another man," was qualified for the new duties to which he was called, he was not made a new creature. Though he was given "another heart," given other aims, fitting him for the government of the kingdom to which

he was called, "the heart of stone" had not become "the heart of flesh;" he was still a natural man, and the carnal mind had not been replaced by the spiritual mind, which is "life and peace." And as we think how a life which began so brightly ended so darkly; as we see Saul, once so tender and dutiful to his father, so humble in his own eyes, so chivalrous in his treatment of his enemies, so brave and courageous in war, departing from God, torn with jealousy and anger, gnawed by remorse, the prey of melancholy, the victim of madness, and closing his career in a suicide's grave, we are warned that our safety lies in nothing short of thorough heart-conversion to God. "If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of His." As in the case of Saul, there may be a change in the outward life; we may become different from what we were, nay, we may have knowledge, enabling us to understand all mysteries; we may have faith, so that we can remove mountains; we may give our goods to feed the poor, and our bodies to be burned; and yet we may not have that anointing from the Spirit, that unction from the Holy One, which guides into all truth, and leads into all holiness,

and seals the soul unto the day of eternal redemption.

We turn to another scene in the life of Saul. The curtain rises upon Saul securely seated on the throne, and acknowledged by all the heads of the tribes to be their king. And now the fair day begins to darken, the dawn is overcast with clouds : he fails in the moral trial to which he is put. He acts foolishly, and sins. The occasion is this. The Philistines, the old enemy of Israel, have planted garrisons in the very heart of their country, and the people are oppressed and trodden down, as they were in the times of the Judges before Deborah, when "there was not a shield or a spear seen among forty thousand in Israel." Now again, "there was no smith found throughout all the land of Israel; for the Philistines said, Lest the Hebrews make them swords or spears : but all the Israelites went down to the Philistines, to sharpen every man his share, and his coulter, and his axe, and his mattock." Saul and Jonathan, his son, who appears for the first time, a noble figure by his father's side, and is foremost in many a deed of daring, revolt against this degrading bondage. They will break the

hard yoke from Israel's neck. Jonathan, in a sudden act of youthful valour, smites the garrison of the Philistines in Geba. No sooner has this first decisive step for freedom been taken than Saul blows the trumpet, and summons the people to gather round his standard at Gilgal. The signal is given for a general revolt. But the Israelites are terror-stricken when they hear of the Philistines mustering their hosts for battle, and bringing into the field "thirty thousand chariots, and six thousand horsemen, and people as the sand which is on the sea-shore in multitude," and "they hide from their enemies in caves, and in thickets, and in rocks, and in high places, and in pits." Some pass over Jordan "to the land of Gad and Gilead," and put the river between them and their dreaded foe. The few hundred men that are left to his standard follow him trembling. At the very outset of Saul's career, on the day when he had been anointed king, Samuel had told him that in all straits he was to send for him, and to go down before him to Gilgal, and wait other seven days until the prophet should come and show him what to do. To Gilgal he accordingly goes, and there waits Samuel's coming. Six days

go past, and every day sees fresh desertions of the people, who are overwhelmed with fear and despair. Saul's patience is exhausted—he will not wait any longer. If Samuel were there he would offer sacrifice; why should not Saul, as a king having the right to sacrifice, do the same? He offers the burnt-offering, and it is hardly completed when Samuel appears, and rebuking his sin, pronounces the divine judgment. “I forced myself” in that sacrifice, is Saul's excuse; as if there had been a struggle in his heart between the fear of God and the fear of man, and the fear of man prevailed. And Samuel said, “Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the Lord thy God, which He commanded thee: for now would the Lord have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever. But now thy kingdom shall not continue,” “because thou hast not kept that which the Lord commanded thee.”

I might dwell here on the evil elements in Saul's character which began in this act of impatient sacrifice to reveal themselves, and which appear in the narrative of his fall—the impatience that rebelled against control, the impulsiveness that defied restraint, the self-will that would, at all

hazards, take its own way, the insincerity that put lying excuses into his lips, and the superstition which made sacrifice greater than obedience, and which subordinated moral duty to a ceremonial act.

The darker lines in the character of Saul come out rapidly one after another. Samuel goes away, and the king is left with an army, whose numbers have diminished down to six hundred men, to oppose the thousands of the Philistines encamped on the heights of Michmash. Still his courage finches not, and from the distant heights of Gibeah he looks across the intervening valley at the foe, not provoking, yet not shunning, the conflict. It was now, in this pause, that Jonathan and his armour-bearer, in a sudden impulse of romantic daring, made an assault in the early morning on the Philistine garrison entrenched on the precipitous pass of Michmash, and that twenty of the enemy, taken by surprise, fell at the first onset. The garrison fled in a panic, which spread through the camp, and the terror of the moment being increased by an earthquake, friend was mistaken for foe, and foe for friend. Saul, who from Gibeah had watched in astonish-

ment the stir and commotion amongst the enemy, rushed across the valley, and with his six hundred men fell headlong on the foe. The Philistines fly before him, and as the band of Israelites at his side is increased by the reappearance of those who, in craven fear, had hidden themselves in the thickets and limestone caves, he hopes to make a total defeat of the affrighted foe. Rash and impetuous, he would deny his exhausted soldiers food until the enemy be slain and driven back to their land: "Cursed be the man that eateth any food until evening, that I may be avenged on mine enemies." The first fatal result of this rash oath was to involve the people in a breach of the ceremonial law. Restrained by the royal oath, the people in general tasted no food for a whole day; and when evening came, impelled by hunger, they flew upon the captured cattle, and tearing them piece-meal, devoured them in violation of the Mosaic law, which forbade the blood to be eaten. To guard against a repetition of the sin, Saul had a stone brought before him on which the animals might be so killed as to be drained of their blood; and he also built an altar on which burnt-offerings should be offered for the expiation of the guilt

that had been incurred. Jonathan, ignorant of his father's rash command, had, when overcome by hunger and faint from the toils of the day, put forth his staff, "and dipped it in an honeycomb, and put his hand to his mouth; and his eyes were enlightened." When Saul proposes to renew his pursuit of the Philistines, the high priest counsels him to consult God in the matter. But the Oracle is silent. The Urim and Thummim give no answer. What sin has been committed? It must be searched out—"As the Lord liveth, though it be my son Jonathan, he shall die." The lot is cast, and it falls on Jonathan. Saul prepares himself for the sacrifice—"God do so and more also, for thou shalt surely die, Jonathan." And the wretched man, though Jonathan had tasted the honey in ignorance of his father's hasty oath, would have put him to death in his pride and self-will, had not the people promptly interfered, and rescued the son from the father's hand.

Imperious and despotic, having no higher law than his own will, the worse features in Saul's character now begin to darken and deepen, and he gives place to the devil more and more. He pays little or no heed to the voice of the Lord speaking through

his prophet, and follows without check the wild and ungovernable impulses of a blinded heart. This is seen in the disregard of God's command about Agag. Samuel commissions Saul to go and execute on Amalek the doom pronounced many hundred years before: "Now go, and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass." Two hundred and ten thousand men rally round the standard of Saul, and respond to his trumpet's call. The Amalekites are smitten hip and thigh through all their borders; but though the people are destroyed with the edge of the sword, Agag is spared and the best of the spoil. Saul, in the pride of his heart, wishes to grace his triumph with the presence of the captive king, and to make a more splendid show at the national thanksgiving. Carrying Agag with him, he passes through Gibeah, and comes to Carmel, where he sets up a monument to commemorate his victory, and then proceeds to Gilgal, down in the plain of Jericho. Samuel is sent to Saul to utter, in God's name, the judgment which this second act of disobedience called down. Saul

meets him with the falsehood on his lips—"Blessed be thou of the Lord: I have performed the commandment of the Lord." Alas! "how are the mighty fallen! How is the most fine gold become dim!" It was a vain attempt to cover over with untruthfulness what could not be concealed. "What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?" And then follows a miserable attempt to throw the guilt upon others—"The people did it." "The people!" What meanness! what hypocrisy! And so he tries to cloak, and excuse, and justify his sin, and in so doing shows how far he has departed from God. "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord?" He indeed confesses his sin, and prays for pardon; but his is not that "godly sorrow which worketh repentance unto salvation not to be repented of." It is "the sorrow of the world that worketh death;" for the great wish of his heart is, that Samuel shall "honour him before the people"—the honour that cometh from man being dearer than the honour which cometh from God only. But the curse is pronounced—"The Lord hath rejected thee

from being king over Israel." Still, so unwilling is Saul to let the prophet depart with words of such solemn judgment on his lips, that, as Samuel turns away, he in his anguish grasps the skirt of his mantle, and it rends in his hand. This is but a sign of the impending curse—"The Lord hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbour of thine that is better than thou."

And now Samuel and Saul part, and the prophet comes to him no more, till the day of his death. For the rest of his course, and it lasted over many years, Saul became a moody, irritable, suspicious man, subject to dark fits of melancholy, afraid of himself, the terror of his subjects, and the victim of a dismal and frenzied mind. "The Spirit of the Lord departs from him," and an "evil spirit from the Lord troubles him." The harp of the youthful David is called in to "minister to this mind diseased," to charm away the demon of madness; and before the music of the shepherd boy, the gloomy spirit flees. But only for a time. The melody of David's harp cannot reach down to the depths of the troubled soul, and heal its confusions, and turn its discords into

harmony. So is it with every earthly harp. All the outward ministries of life, gifted as they may be with soothing power, are like David's music, but limited in their effects : they can charm away the sorrow for a time, but they cannot touch the spring of the malady, or chase the dark spirit for ever away. There is only one harp which can change sadness into joy. It is the gospel of the grace of God, when the chords are struck by David's greater Son. This is heavenly minstrelsy. Oh, in the time of your distress turn to the Lord! Seek not to banish trouble by worldly contrivances. Let God be your refuge and strength; for He only is a very present help; He only can reach down to the heart's coré, and with the healing touch of His mighty yet tender hand, bring its jarring discords into tune.

And now we see Saul the victim of a distempered mind, and subject to violent paroxysms of ungovernable rage; torn by anger and jealousy; his love to David turning to a murderous hate. He is gnawed with envy as he hears the praises of the youthful champion of Israel, who had slain the great Philistine, sung by the maidens of the people, "Saul has slain his thousands, and

David his ten thousands." He lays a cunning snare for his life, by betrothing him to his daughter, and making the condition of his marriage the slaughter of so many Philistines, in hopes that he may fall, slain by the sword of the enemy. When this plot fails, he commands Jonathan and his servants to kill David. He himself tries to transfix him to the wall with his javelin. He banishes him from his court; he denounces him as a rebel; and he puts the priests to death who aid him in his flight from the pursuer. Then there comes a pause in the storm. There is a passing burst of better feeling, and he relents when he finds that though he was in David's power, he was saved by David's generosity; and bursting into a flood of tears at the chivalrous magnanimity of the man whose life he is seeking, a better spirit for the time returns. "Is this thy voice, my son David? And he lifted up his voice and wept. I have sinned. Return, my son David; behold I have played the fool, and erred exceedingly. Blessed be thou, my son David; thou shalt both do great things, and also shalt still prevail." These better emotions soon vanish, and the evil spirit resumes its ascendancy.

The curtain now rises on the last sad act of Saul's dark and tragic life.

Samuel is dead. David is an exile ; his harp is no longer near to drive away the evil spirit. The Philistines have mustered at Shunem, in the large open plain of Esdraelon. Saul pitched his tents on the heights of Gilboa, on the opposite side of the plain, on the very ground where, in a former time, Gideon and his army had encamped against the Midianites. Looking from the slopes of Mount Gilboa, Saul sees the host of the Philistines, and though naturally brave and courageous, he is "afraid, and his heart greatly trembles." And now where shall he turn for help ? God has rejected him—naturally ; for he had forsaken God, despised His commandments, slain His servants. He is now only driven to pray through fear. When he inquires of the Lord, the Lord answers him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets. Thus God-forsaken, he turns to a sorceress, who undertook by her incantations to call up the spirits of the dead, and put them in communication with the living. The necromancers whom he had in former years sought to cut off from the land, in accordance with the express

command of God, now become his resource. God showed His abhorrence of witchcraft and sorcery by directing that every woman with a familiar spirit, and every wizard, should be put to death; they were to be “stoned with stones, and their blood was to be upon them.” Any attempt to lift the veil from what He has concealed, and to pry into the secrets of the invisible world, is a crime in His sight. What, therefore, is called “spiritualism” at the present day, if it be not a gross imposture, must be great wickedness; and no one who has any regard for God and His wishes should have anything to do with such “lying wonders,” which if not supernatural and diabolical, are no better than the cunning tricks of the juggler.

At Endor, on the other side of that ridge at the foot of which the Philistines are encamped, is a woman reported to have a familiar spirit. Her he will consult, and through her incantations obtain an interview with Samuel—Samuel, the friend and adviser of his youth; whose counsel he once despised, but who, now, utterly forlorn as he is, he yearns to see again. And so in disguise, and in the darkness of the night, and attended by two trusty men, he seeks across the hills her lonely

dwelling, that he may win from hell the knowledge which Heaven refuses to give. Alas! Is this Saul that was once among the prophets? He is now filling up the measure of his sin and his open apostasy from God.

How weird, how tragic the scene in the witch's cave! Whom shall the woman call up from the grave by her charms and incantations? Whom shall she summon from the world of death by her guilty magic? How deeply pathetic are the words of the friendless king as he says in reply, "Bring me up Samuel." Samuel, the bold reprover of his sin, the faithful counsellor. Saul does not ask for the hollow flatterers, but the true friend whose value he has known. There is something very suggestive in this thought. We may in the days of our youth, and strength, and pride slight and scorn the true counsel of a parent or friend; but when sorrow comes, or anxiety, or distress, it is to them we would flee, and not to the companions of our folly or our sin.

"Bring me up Samuel." Covered with his mantle, the old man rises from the world of darkness and of death. While the woman is preparing her incantations, God himself interposes, and

sends up the prophet from the grave, and gives him a message of woe for the apostate king. The woman is evidently surprised when she sees the apparition rising from the earth, and her loud shriek of terror is proof that she does not expect any such result from her devilish arts. But God will thus answer Saul, and the obdurate king shall learn his doom from the lips of the same old man whose counsel he formerly contemned.

Very thrilling are the words that pass between Samuel and Saul. Sadly and reproachfully must the well-remembered voice have fallen on the ear of the guilty king. He had grieved Samuel when living: was not this enough? “Why hast thou disquieted me to bring me up?” And the words of despair break from the lips of that abandoned man—“I am sore distressed: for the Philistines make war against me, and God is departed from me, and answereth me no more, neither by prophets, nor by dreams; therefore I have called thee, that thou mayest make known unto me what I shall do.” But he receives no advice; is given no hope; hears only the old rebuke and judgment for his sin—“Wherefore then dost thou ask of me, seeing the Lord is

departed from thee, and is become thine enemy? ” He that can obtain no comfort from God, how can he expect to get comfort from God’s prophet? Samuel further reminds him of his wicked disobedience, and since he will draw the veil from the future, he shall know that his death is at hand—“To-morrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me: the Lord also shall deliver the host of Israel into the hand of the Philistines.”

We are not surprised when we see the unhappy king, in the utter fear and desolation of that moment, crushed by the prophet’s judgment, which rung the death-knell of hope in his ear, falling full-length on the floor, his strength and courage entirely gone. Is this he that was the desire of all Israel? the chosen and goodly youth, whose life began so brightly, and looked so full of promise? We pity him; we cannot but pity him, as we see him fallen so low. Samuel returns to the rest from which he had been called, and Saul draws nearer to his doom.

Now comes the closing scene of all—a scene of battle and blood. The army of Israel flies before the Philistines, and is driven up to the heights of Gilboa. There the slaughter is great. Saul and

his three sons are hard pressed by the enemy, and the latter fall before the Philistines' sword. The father sees Jonathan and Abinidab and Melchi-shua slain before his eyes. The king himself is wounded; many bows have been bent against his royal person; and now the archers have hit him, and the arrows have drunk his blood. His sons slain, his army defeated, himself sorely wounded, dreading to fall alive into the hands of the Philistines—he longs for death, and, in the bitterness of despair, he turns to his armour-bearer, and begs him to thrust him through with his sword. When the man refuses, the king—tortured, sorely bestead, wounded in body, sick at heart—falls upon his own sword, and dies. Such is the end of this tragic story: the sun of that life, that rose so brightly, now sets in darkness and in blood.

And it contains a lesson for us all, not to “grieve,” or “resist,” or “quench” the Spirit, and to rest satisfied with nothing short of a renewed mind and a converted heart. Emotion is not enough. Feeling is not enough. Nothing can stand us instead of the life of Christ in the soul. Oh, if the mountains of Gilboa impress

this lesson upon us, they are amongst "the Hills that will bring us peace."

And lastly, a word about the elegy so beautiful—so pathetic—which David chanted over Saul, and which the Hebrew mothers were to teach their children.

Well might David speak of his prowess, of the valour of his sword, of his personal beauty, of his eagle swiftness, of his lion strength. Well might he remind the daughters of Israel of the social benefits his long reign procured them, how he "clothed them in scarlet, with other delights," and how he "put ornaments of gold upon their apparel." But how could he place the father and the son on the same level, and say that they were "lovely and pleasant in their lives," or that "in their death they were not divided"? Brethren, David is giving us in this touching lament no express judgment on the character of Saul. He is only pouring forth the sorrows of his own heart—a heart which, in the first outburst of its grief, forgets all that was dark in the life of the man he laments, and remembers only the bright and the noble and the good. This is but natural. When the grave has closed over the dead, we

draw a veil over the faults of them who have gone from us for ever; we wipe from our memory every wrong and injury done to ourselves; and we allow a place in our minds for only what was bright and hopeful and good. So David thought only of the promise of Saul's youth, of the brave warrior, the king generous and beloved, the father of his dearest friend; and the gloom and the melancholy, the pride and the passion, and the ungoverned impulses of the man, faded out of sight, as, mourning his death, he spake of him and Jonathan as being "lovely and pleasant in their lives."

Nor in death were they divided. They fell in the same battle, on the heights of the same hill, and were committed to the same grave. For David pronounces no judgment on the life which followed that tragic death on Gilboa. He writes no lying epitaphs on his grave-stone. He pauses at the tomb. He refers only to the burial of the king and his three sons by the valiant men of Jabesh-Gilead who never forgot their debt of gratitude to Saul for deliverance from the Ammonites, and who, to repay it, "went all night, and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall

of Beth-shan," where the Philistines in their cruel triumph had fastened them, and "buried them under a tree at Jabesh." There is no confounding of good and evil, right and wrong, in the elegy of David over the fallen king and the faithful friend, who had been slain in the battle, it is only that the darker features of his story are swallowed up in the brighter recollections of the earlier time.

And so with this key to a lament as fine as the profoundest grief or noblest poetry ever uttered, I shall close this lecture on Gilboa. Let us read it again :—

"The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places : how are the mighty fallen ! Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon ; lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph. Ye mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew, neither let there be rain, upon you, nor fields of offerings : for there the shield of the mighty is vilely cast away, the shield of Saul, as though he had not been anointed with oil. From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan turned not back, and the sword of Saul

returned not empty. Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided: they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions. Ye daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you in scarlet, with other delights, who put on ornaments of gold upon your apparel. How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle! O Jonathan, thou wast slain in thine high places. I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women. How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!"

CARME L,
THE MOUNTAIN OF DECISION.

IX.

CARMEL.

“Now therefore send, and gather to me all Israel unto mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the groves four hundred, which eat at Jezebel’s table. So Ahab sent unto all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together unto mount Carmel.”—
I KINGS XVIII. 19, 20.

CARMEL, which means, “the Park,” or the well-wooded place, is a mountain which forms one of the most striking and characteristic features of the country of Palestine.

This noble ridge, the only headland of lower and central Palestine, and also its southern boundary, runs out with a bold bluff promontory all but into the very waves of the Mediterranean.

From this point, it stretches in a nearly straight line, bearing about S.S.E. for a little more than twelve miles, when it terminates suddenly in a bluff somewhat corresponding to its western end, breaking down abruptly into the

hills of Jenin and Samaria, which form at that point the central mass of the country.

Carmel thus stands as a wall between the maritime plain of Sharon on the south, and the more inland expanse of Esdraelon on the north. Its structure is in the main the same as that which is prevalent in the centre of western Palestine—a soft white limestone, with nodules and veins of flint. In form Carmel is a tolerably continuous ridge, at the west end about 600, and at the east about 1600 feet above the sea. The scenery of this mountain is exceedingly picturesque. It is more than once alluded to in the Scriptures.

Taking a figure from its beauty, Solomon says of the Bride in the Song of Songs: “Thine head upon thee is like Carmel:” and Isaiah sings of the “excellency of Carmel and Sharon:” and its rich pasturage is spoken of by the prophets Jeremiah and Amos.

Modern travellers tell us that it is still covered with the same “excellency” of wood: and they delight to describe its “rocky dells with deep jungles of copse:” “its shrubberies thicker than any others in central Palestine:” “its impenetrable brushwood of oaks, and other evergreens,

tenanted in the wilder parts by a profusion of game and wild animals : ” “ but in other places bright with holly-hocks, jasmine, and various flowering creepers.”

That which gives Carmel its peculiar interest is its connection with the history of Elijah.

Here, as we shall presently see, he brought back Israel to their allegiance to Jehovah, and slew the prophets of the false god : and here it was that he called down fire from heaven to consume the successive fifties of the guard which Ahaziah had sent to take him prisoner.

But let us now turn to the lessons taught by Carmel ; and if we learn them in a right spirit, we shall find that this is one of “ the hills that bring peace.” I shall, in the first place, glance at the history of Elijah’s times. Ahab was the king of Israel. He was a man who sold himself to work wickedness. “ He did evil in the sight of the Lord, above all that were before him.” He married, contrary to the law, a heathen princess, and openly adopted the heathen worship. Jezebel, the daughter of the king of Zidon, easily introduced and established the Zidonian idolatry, the worship of Baalim, or the heavenly hosts.

This fierce and fiendish woman, whose name is introduced into the New Testament as the type of all that is wicked and sensual, well-nigh suppressed the religion of Jehovah, and exterminated His prophets. A small but chosen band escaped the fury of Ahab, and his cruel and idolatrous queen. Amongst these was Elijah. He comes abruptly without any previous introduction in the scene. Suddenly this prophet of the mountains, with long flowing hair, mantle of sheepskin, and a girdle of leather about his loins, appears before Ahab as the champion of the True God, come to denounce the wickedness of the king, and to predict a terrible drought as a judgment upon his sin.

Stalking up to him, unsummoned, unwelcomed, with steady step, and stern look: doom in his voice, and judgment in his eye, he delivers the divine message—"As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word."

The curse in due season falls: the rain is withheld, the springs are dried up, the brooks fail, the rivers are exhausted in their channels:

the trees wither, the grass is scorched: "the heaven that is over them becomes brass, and the earth that is under them is as iron." So the drought continues for three long years, and blight and famine are the consequences; there is "cleanness of teeth" through the land of Israel: children cry for bread, and mothers have none to give them. During this period of distress, when the land groaned under the horrors of famine, Elijah, miraculously preserved, at one time in the green thickets of Cherith, where he was fed by ravens—at another, in the village of Zarephath, where he was sustained by the widow of Zidon,—absented himself from the court of the idolatrous king; but when the drought was drawing to a close, he was commissioned by God to present himself before Ahab again, and to promise him that the heavens should yield their rain.

Ahab had been sorely distressed during the famine, and throwing the blame, not on his own apostacy, but on what he deemed the fanaticism of Elijah, he laid at the prophet's door the horrors of a parched land and a famished population. He therefore searched in every quarter for the prophet, that he might wreak his vengeance upon his

head. And now at last, the man whom he has long desired to see appears suddenly before him. Ahab with hate stamped on his scowling brow, and anger gleaming in his vindictive eyes, turns on the prophet saying: "Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" Calm, terrible, and intrepid, is the prophet's reply, "I have not troubled Israel: but thou and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim."

And now that Elijah, the object of his displeasure, is within his grasp, how is it that the king does not lift so much as a finger against him. Here is the man from whose lips the withering curse had fallen; whose prayers had shut up the heavens; whose life was a protest against Israel's idolatry.

And what doeth Ahab? His wrath spends itself, like foam against the rock, in the angry question, "Art thou he that troubleth Israel?"

Brethren, God protects His own; so that not a hair of their head can be harmed without His permission. He restrains and controls the violence of their enemies. A truth this, to which Balaam gave utterance many years before, when

he said, under the constraining influence of Him who compelled the covetous prophet to bless the people whom he had come to curse: "There is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel." What comfort should this thought give to the humblest believer, in the discharge of duty! What courage should it impart to the children of God! Strong in weakness, safe amid peril, with what blessed sense of security may the Christian front danger, and face death, an illustration of the words of David—"He shall cover thee with His feathers, and under His wings shalt thou trust; His truth shall be thy shield and buckler."

The prophet and the king meet face to face, and Elijah challenges Ahab to make a fair and open trial in the presence of all Israel, as to whether Jehovah or Baal be the proper object of national worship. The challenge is accepted. Carmel is to be the place where the question shall be decided.

Here assemble the king and the people, with the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, and the four hundred prophets of the grove, which ate

at Jezebel's table ; and here comes the Prophet of the Lord, a solitary man against a nation.

Imagine yourselves in the early morning on that mountain brow, on the green upland where Elijah, faithful only among the faithless, was to vindicate the honour of Jehovah, in presence of an apostate people and their king. Before him lay the sparkling waters of the blue Mediterranean ; beneath him stretched the noble plain of Megiddo ; in the distance rose the stately city of Jezreel, with the palace of Ahab, and the temple of Jezebel surrounded by its sacred grove ; and through the spreading valley flowed that ancient river, the river Kishon, that swept away Sisera and his host, in the days of Deborah and Barak. And now the voice of Elijah is heard breaking the silence as he appeals with authority to the people : " How long halt ye between two opinions ? If the Lord be God, follow Him ; but if Baal, then follow him." The people answer him not a word.

You remember the test by which the supremacy of Jehovah or of Baal was to be decided. The champion of Jehovah, and the champions of Baal, were to choose each one bullock ; to cut it in pieces, to lay it on wood, and to put no fire under

it; and then each was to call respectively on the name of Baal and Jehovah; and the God that answered by fire, was to be acknowledged as the true God. The priests of Baal enter first on the grand ordeal. The altar is raised, and the bullock slain, and from the morning even until the evening, they call on the name of Baal, crying, "O Baal, hear us!" There is no voice in reply. With frantic violence they leap on the altar, and their cries grow louder, all to no purpose. No flame falls from heaven. And now Elijah is heard speaking in a tone of bitter irony, of biting sarcasm, and saying: "Cry aloud, for he is a god: either he is talking," and is too busy to hear you, "or he is pursuing," and cannot attend to you; "or he is on a journey," and too far to catch your cry; "or peradventure he sleepeth," is taking his midday siesta, and must be awaked. Maddened by the sarcasm of his words, they raise their voices louder, and cut and gash themselves with knives and lancets, until they are smeared and covered with blood. By this time, it is evening: and no fire has fallen from the skies; no flame has burst from the ground.

And now Elijah comes calmly forward, and

bidding Baal's prophets stand aloof, and calling the people around him, he takes twelve stones, as representing the twelve tribes of Israel, and repairs the broken altar, and making a trench about it, and laying the bullock on the wood, he commands that barrel after barrel of water be poured on the burnt sacrifice, that the answer may be the more convincing. He then at the time of the evening sacrifice, as the sun is beginning to sink in the Western sea, sends up his prayer, with the calm earnestness of faith, to the God of his fathers, the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob : " Let it be known this day, that Thou art God in Israel, and that I am Thy servant, and that I have done all these things at Thy word. Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that Thou art the Lord God, and that Thou hast turned their heart back again ! " The answer came. " The fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. " When the people see the instant answer to the prayer, there is a sudden revulsion of feeling ; they fall prostrate on the ground, they utter a universal cry — " The

Lord, He is the God ; the Lord, He is the God ! ” And now the false prophets, who turned the hearts of Israel from the Lord, are doomed to perish. At the command of Elijah, they are seized by the people, who lead them down from Carmel into the valley, and when they reach the brook Kishon, Elijah himself slays them, sword in hand, and the river is crimsoned with their blood.

Let us pause here, to gather up some lessons that may profit. Brethren, in reading the history of Elijah’s times, there is forced on the mind the thought that the world, while differing in many of its social aspects, and having undergone many changes, is in reality very much the same now as it was in those bygone times. Human nature is a constant. It repeats itself in every age. As there were in Ahab’s days men who had entirely gone over to idolatry, and “ bowed the knee to Baal ; ” as there were then others who were undecided in their choice of an object of worship, the true God or the false, halters between two opinions ; and as there were at that time a few like Elijah—seven thousand out of the number of Israel—who were “ strong in faith,” zealous for

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the Lord of Hosts, and intolerant of error, so is it at the present time.

We have our open Baal-worshippers—who “deny the Lord that bought them;” scoffers who walk after their own lusts; infidels, blasphemers, and profane, who “as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not, and shall utterly perish in their own corruption.”

Elsewhere than in Israel, and in other days than those of Ahab, “there be lords many, and gods many.” Jehovah’s complaint against Israel was: “They have forsaken me, and have worshipped Ashtoroth, the goddess of the Zidonians, Chemosh, god of the Moabites, and Milcom the god of the children of Ammon.” But Christendom has a larger Pantheon, has as many gods as it has objects—be they innocent or guilty—which usurp the place of Jehovah, and dethrone Him in the creature’s heart. Is not the sensual man—slave of lust and passion—an idolater, though he burns no incense at the shrine of Ashtoroth, the Zidonian Venus?

Is not the drunkard—who sacrifices body and soul, wife and children, to the indulgence of his

accursed appetite, an idolater; though he kneels not at the altar of Bacchus—the god of wine?

Is not the lover of money, whose one object is to grow rich; who toils for this; who lives for this; rises up early, and late takes rest, for this; an idolater, though he does not build a temple to Mammon, and present before a golden image his morning and evening prayers? Is not he an idolater, who, a slave to the opinions of the world, subservient to its opinions—in bondage to its fashions—prefers its approval, and dreads its frown, more than he loves the smile, or fears the disapprobation of God? The fact is, brethren, if we look around us, we shall find that there are many—all indeed whose hearts are not right with God—who in spirit are as much idolaters—worshipping the creature in one form or other—as those who in Elijah's days forsook the covenant of the Lord of Hosts, and bowed the knee to Baal.

But there was a second class in that olden time, who have their representatives in the present day, “the halters between two opinions.”

These were worshippers neither exclusively of the false god nor the true; men of an uncertain creed, and an undecided theology. Assembling one day

with the congregation on the holy hill of Zion, and on the next sanctioning with their presence the idolatrous rites of Carmel. As court influence and favour were all on the side of the darling superstition of Queen Jezebel, fashion held these vacillating halts in its chain; and though they had not openly cast in their lot with the worshippers of Baal, yet they sought to effect a happy compromise by carrying on both religions together.

And have we not amongst us now half-hearted, double-minded, undecided professors of religion? Are there not to be found amongst those who "call themselves Christians," many who "halt between two opinions?" who strive to join together what God has put asunder—"the service of the world; and the service of the gospel, the worship of God and Baal; of Christ and Mammon?" They pride themselves on being "moderate men," holding no extreme views; and so free are they from all narrow-minded bigotry, that they are tolerant of all creeds, provided the worshippers are sincere. Earnestness, though it be the earnestness of error, with them covers the multitude of sins. But this false and spurious charity arises,

in point of fact, from a disbelief in the paramount authority of God, and from the absence of a true regard for His exclusive claims. Brethren, the religion of too many is but a piece of wretched temporising—a sickly and insipid compromise—a thing which God abhors, and from which He turns away in disgust.

What said “the faithful and true Witness” to the Church of the Laodiceans? “I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot; I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.” “Neither cold nor hot,” that is—undecided—“halting between two opinions;” not willing to loose either world, yet wishing, if it were possible, to make the best of both; owning neither to the boldness of an enemy of God, nor manifesting the zeal of a friend of Christ.

Oh, if there be any of you who are thus undecided in your service of God, “having a form of godliness without the power,” contented with the shell of piety without its kernel; the casket without the jewel; the body without the life; and who are satisfied with a languid, feeble chameleon-

like religion, whose colour changes with the changing principles of the times, come, "choose ye this day, whom ye will serve!" Be brave, one way or the other. God or Mammon; Christ or Belial—Which?

Before God, and "the Lord Jesus Christ who shall judge the quick and the dead at His appearing in His kingdom, and before the elect angels," I put to you the question of Elijah, "How long halt ye between two opinions?" And I urge upon you the alternative, "If the Lord be God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him?"

But there was a third class in the reign of Ahab and Jezebel; smaller than either of the other two; composed of those who "worshipped God in spirit and in truth." Like Elijah, there were seven thousand in Israel at that time, whom the Lord had "reserved unto Himself" by His own special grace, and who did not bow the knee to the image of Baal. They were men of zeal and faithfulness—bold for God—who felt that the idolatry practised by the court was utterly incompatible with the worship of Jehovah.

And so God has a people now, who are jealous of His honour, and separated in His electing love

from the world; and who, “through evil report and good report,” devote themselves unreservedly to His service. They acknowledge God’s authority to be paramount, and having all confidence in His word, they make it the rule and guide of their life, “a light to their feet, and a lamp to their paths.” With them religion is incomparably the chief concern, “the one thing needful.” “They seek first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness,” and with undivided concentration of purpose, as those who acknowledge a living God above them, an immortal soul within them, a heaven or hell before them, make it their endeavour to say with Paul,—“This one thing I do, forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forth unto those things that are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling in Christ Jesus.”

Brethren, there are, and can be, no half-measures in genuine religion; it is everything, or it is nothing. It demands all our earnestness; it puts in its claim for all our heart; it will not be satisfied with concession and compromise; and herein it differs widely from all other things which press themselves upon our attention. With respect to

the things of this world, its business and politics, its pleasures and occupations, the command is, "Let your moderation be known unto all men;" let "those that have wives be as though they have none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not."

With regard to the truth of God, and the claims of God, we are to drink into the spirit of Him of whom it is written: "The zeal of Thine house hath even eaten me." You will understand from this, how opposed to one another is the spirit which is of the world, and the spirit which is of God.

The world's enthusiasm is kept for literature, and science, and the arts; for commerce, and farming, and manufactures; for all that can minister to the luxuries, or the convenience, or indulgence of man. The world can understand a passion for music, a passion for poetry, a passion for painting; but a divine passion for God and for Christ, this it cannot understand, this it contemns. Its apathy, and indifference, and unconcern, are reserved for the service of God and the cause of

His Son. On the other hand, the Christian's zeal is enlisted in the honour of his Divine Master; Christ and His Cross; God and His Truth; his moderation is for the world, and the things thereof. And we cannot wonder, if in his readiness to encounter the world's offence, to oppose its maxims, to brave its opposition, to scorn its contempt, and to sacrifice its friendships, the man of God should be deemed like Elijah, "a troubler of Israel."

The timid and the hesitating; and the halting and the indifferent, naturally feel themselves condemned by those who are decided for Christ, and who dare avow themselves as not ashamed of His cause and cross and crown. And hence their dislike to the true and faithful servant of God. But, brethren, be not discouraged by this, as if some strange thing happened unto you. Stand up in the strength of God for the good, the holy, and the true; "speaking the truth in love;" seeking men's profit, not their praise; and assured that you will find the promise verified in your experience, "Them that honour me, I will honour; and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed."

After Elijah's triumph over the priests of Baal,

he goes up to Carmel, and the king at his bidding goes up too, and there on the peaceful top of the mountain, where the sacrificial feast is spread, he gives Ahab the assurance of relief from the long drought and famine. "Get thee up, eat and drink, for there is a sound of abundance of rain." By no other ears but his was that sound heard; by no other eyes but his were the signs of refreshing rain perceived. He looks to the blue waters of the Mediterranean sea—there is not a ripple on the waves; the sun has set, but a light lingers in the heavens, and the horizon is clear—not a cloud is to be seen in the sky—the sultry heat has not diminished: and another burning day of thirst and famine is closing upon the parched hills and valleys of Israel. What hope is there that the morrow shall be different? But Elijah walks by faith and not by sight, he staggers not through unbelief; and "hoping against hope," he tells the king there is no longer any occasion to abstain from food: the rain is at hand.

So Ahab goes up to Carmel to eat and drink; but still there is no sign of rain. The prophet's faith is put to a sore trial. And what does he in

this strait? Grow careless as to the event? Sink into heartless despair? Not so; casting himself upon the earth, with head bent between his knees, there, as St James tells us, "he prayed for rain." Expecting an answer, he said to the attendant boy: "Go up now, and look towards the sea." He returns with the dispiriting answer, "There is nothing." Nothing! Is this the fulfilment of God's promise? Nothing! Has "the Lord forgotten to be gracious?"

But, strong in faith, Elijah bids his servant go again, and yet again, even till seven times, assured that the strength of Israel was not a "man, that he should lie: nor the Son of man, that He should repent; hath He said, and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?" And his faith is rewarded.—"At the seventh time," the boy said: "Behold there ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand." The prophet not "despising the day of small things," hailed that little cloud appearing from the far-off horizon of the sea, as the harbinger of the hoped-for relief, knowing that it would spread till it covered the whole vault of heaven, and then break in "showers of

blessing" on the thirsty land. "Go up," he says triumphantly to his servant, "Go up, say unto Ahab, prepare thy chariot, and get thee down; that the rain stop thee not. And it came to pass in the meanwhile, that the heaven was black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain." And now with thunders roaring, lightning flashing, rain pouring from the skies, and foaming torrents leaping down the hills, the king drives on his startled horses, and Elijah runs by his side.

Such are the triumphs of faith, and prayer, and patience.

Children of God, these things were written not for our entertainment, but for our instruction; not so much for our admiration, as our admonition. Let Carmel teach us to place unbounded trust in every promise of God's word. Let it also teach us that "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." So will "this hill bring us peace." "Be instant in prayer." "Pray without ceasing." "Men ought always to pray, and not to faint." Do you pray for some blessing spiritual or temporal, and does the answer seem long in coming? Do you long for more faith,

more peace, more love? Do you desire a larger measure of the Spirit? The refreshing showers of grace? Delay is not denial. Is God silent? He would have you cry to Him again. He is putting faith and patience on their trial. Go again, and yet again, to the Throne of Grace; go, not until seven times, but until seventy times seven. "Though the vision tarry, wait for it." In God's time, which is the best time, "the little cloud"—evidence of coming mercy—will appear, it will grow and enlarge, and it will at length discharge itself in "a gracious rain" on your head. Be not faithless. Believe all that God has revealed; hope for all, yea, expect all that God has promised. How think you? "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" Here, indeed, is the unanswerable logic of love, the greater gift insures the lesser, and every gift must be small in comparison with the gift of the only-begotten Son.

Therefore, let faith, lifting an undaunted eye to heaven, rise to the loftiest flights, and soar to the Throne of Grace on the strong expanded wings of prayer.

“Faith, mighty faith, the promise sees,
And trusts to that alone,
Laughs at impossibilities,
And says, It shall be done.”

Well may this be our prayer, “Lord, I believe;
help my unbelief.” “Lord, increase our faith!”

THE MOUNT OF THE
BEATITUDES.

X.

THE MOUNT OF THE BEATITUDES.

“And seeing the multitudes, He went up into a mountain; and when He was set, His disciples came unto Him.”—MATT. v. 1.

WE now pass from the old dispensation to the new; from the rudimentary economy to the perfect; from the law with its precepts and its burdens, to the Gospel with its grace and its glory. We have had a glimpse of Moses, the mediator of the old Covenant on Sinai, and of Elijah, the prophet of the old Covenant on Carmel; but a greater than either is here.

We stand not now on the mountain that might be touched, and that burned with fire, “and that was shrouded in blackness and darkness and tempest;” nor do we stand on the mountain where vengeance was wreaked on the fierce and savage priests of Baal, and their blood was mingled with the waters of Kishon; but we stand on the fair slopes of the Galilean hill, and we

listen to words of blessing and of peace. A greater than Moses or Elias is here. This is He that is "fairer than the children of men ;" whose brow is crowned with a mournful majesty ; whose eyes are lighted up with a more than human love ; whose heart is full of tenderness, and His hands of blessings ; whose lips are clothed with grace and truth ; and whose words "drop as the rain, and distil as the dew." The law of the old kingdom is now to be superseded by the law of the new.

The name of the mountain where Jesus spake the most beautiful and profound sermon that has been recorded by the evangelists, is not given in the sacred text. It is thought to be a hill in the neighbourhood of Capernaum, overlooking the Sea of Tiberias, and the plain of Gennesaret, and called, from its two prominences, "The horns of Hattin," Hattin being a village at its base. Just below it sparkled the still waters of the Sea of Tiberias, while lying across the valley, about seven miles off, lay the busy town of Capernaum : in the distance stretched the glittering waves of the Mediterranean ; in the nearer landscape rose the wooded heights of Carmel, and the long ridge

of the mountains of Gilboa; and far away beyond, the snowy heights of Lebanon formed a white wall on the blue horizon.

The upland slopes of this "Hill of Blessing" were green with tender verdure, and carpeted with a rich variety of shrubs and flowers, conspicuous among which was the brilliant scarlet lily of Palestine, so gorgeous in its colouring that our Lord says of it: "Even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." In the midst of such natural beauty, with the birds that "neither sow nor reap, nor gather into barns," singing in the leafy branches of the terebinth, or oak, and in the fair and fresh morning light, Jesus spoke those Beatitudes which have given a name to the mountain for evermore.

Let us briefly look at the incidents which preceded the Sermon on the Mount.

For nearly a whole year, Jesus had preached the Gospel of the Kingdom in Judea, and had wrought many a miracle of mercy, and His success with the people had stirred up the enmity of the Scribes and Pharisees.

Having healed an impotent man on the Sabbath-day, they made this a pretext for the wish to lay

hands on Him, and put Him to death. John the Baptist, because of his faithful dealing with Herod on the question of his marriage with his brother Philip's wife, had been at this time cast into prison. This induces Jesus to withdraw into Galilee, and for a time He dwells at Nazareth. Presently He comes and takes up His abode at Capernaum, and by His residence there the prophecy is fulfilled, "The people which sat in darkness saw a great light, and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death, light is sprung up." "The common people hear Him gladly." His preaching is popular; His wonderful works attract many round His person. This only increases the hostility of the leading party amongst the Jews, who lay hold of every opportunity of showing their opposition, and who, "filled with madness," take counsel how they may accomplish His destruction. From the wrath and enmity of man, He turns for refuge to communion with God.

"It came to pass in those days that He went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God." On the brow of the hill which overlooks the lake with its fishing

villages, and the busy towns where His enemies dwell, He poured out His heart to His Father in heaven, asking, no doubt, strength and courage for the work that He had undertaken, and wisdom to guide Him in walking along the terrible path which lay before Him, and whose end was to be in blood. He was about to lay on the morrow the foundations of His kingdom; to choose the twelve apostles on whom the Church was to be built, He himself being its chief corner-stone; and His soul must have gone out for them in prayer, that they might prove worthy of this high calling, and might be fitting instruments to advance the glory of God, and promote the salvation of man. They were to be with Him in His temptations and trials; they were to be His chosen companions, His familiar friends; they were to be His witnesses before men. And He would in that lonely night of long intercession consecrate them to the duties of their lofty vocation. How near were heaven and earth brought together on that night of prayer! How close that mountain-top to the pure and cloudless skies! How much of the grace and power with which these men were filled—filled, all of them save one, “the son of perdition,” mysteriously

chosen to be an apostle—was owing to that solitary watch on the hillside of Galilee, beneath the bright and burning stars of heaven! The morning found Jesus on His knees, and as the sweet light broke over the blue hills, and gleamed and glittered in the waters of the lake below, He girded Himself in the strength of that night-long prayer for the work of the coming day.

His first act was to call to Him the disciples, whom He had left at the foot of the mountain, and out of them He chose twelve, whom also He named apostles; and He ordained them that “they might be with Him, and that He might send them forth to preach.” Several of these selected men had been followers of Jesus before this, and had been drawn to Him by the loving words of attraction. He had found Andrew and his brother Simon on the borders of the Jordan, after His baptism; there too Philip and Nathanael were addressed in the words, “Follow me.” John was also there, but he and his brother James had received a later call to leave their fishing nets and follow Him; while Matthew had been invited, while sitting two days before at the receipt of custom, to give up all for Him. Besides these,

His choice falls on Thomas, and “James the son of Alphæus, and Simon called Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James, and last in the list, Judas Iscariot, who also was the traitor.” No doubt there was a special fitness in these men—in all but one—for the great work to which they were ordained; and the Saviour knew their exact qualifications for advancing the interests of that spiritual kingdom which He came to establish in the world. To their natural qualifications, He by His grace would add those spiritual gifts and graces which would make these fishermen and tax-gatherers “mighty through God, to the pulling down of strongholds,” and mighty through God to the laying the foundations of that Church, against which the gates of hell itself should not prevail. That little band of twelve gathered on that mountain slope around their Master, a carpenter from Nazareth, they themselves being men ignorant and unlearned, and of humble position, teaches us that God can work by few or by many; by the mean, as well as by the mighty; and that in the laws of His kingdom, it is “not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts.” Are these the men that shall go forth to

do battle with Jewish prejudice and Gentile pride? to conquer the world's superstitions and idolatry? and to plant their Master's standard on many a ruined temple, and desolated shrine? Even so: because "the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men." Had the people of His day known the great thoughts swelling in the heart of Him whom they called the Nazarene, and the cause which He was about to intrust into the hands of these twelve men, some of them as rude and rough as the sea from which they earned their daily bread, they would have laughed the enterprise to scorn; but God, in His divine wisdom, chose "the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God chose the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence." That scene on the Mount of the Beatitudes is one of the very best illustrations of the apostle's words: "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord."

When the twelve apostles had been chosen, and solemnly ordained to their sacred office, the

morning had far advanced ; and a great multitude, attracted by the fame of His miracles, and coming from Galilee and Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judea, and from beyond Jordan, brought their sick to Him for healing. He saw them thronging up the steep hillside, and though He must have been wearied and worn after a sleepless night, and may have well wished for quiet and rest, yet, forgetful of self, He only thought of the needs of those who were tormented with divers diseases and possessed with devils, and He went forward to meet and to heal them. He led His disciples to a level spot some way down the hill, and there, standing among the sick—a very fountain of health and life to the diseased—He healed them with a touch, cast out devils, and restored lunatics to their right mind. When all were cured, and their bodily needs met ; when “the tongue of the dumb could sing, and the ears of the deaf were unstopped,” when “the lame man could leap as an hart,” and “the eyes of the blind could look upon the face of their Benefactor ;” then, that He might instruct those whom He had healed, and who were unwilling to leave Him, He withdrew again to the higher slopes, and sat down

to teach them. His audience was a very mixed one. Nearest to His person were the twelve, beyond them the disciples from whom they had just been chosen, and beyond these again a vast concourse of people from all parts of Syria, and composed of all ranks and conditions of men, and of the various sects that then divided the Jewish nation into religious castes. And now, seated on the grassy slopes of the mountain-side—His temple, the open air; its roof, the fair morning-sky; its walls, the hills that girdle the lake which shines like a silver mirror below; and its light, the sun—He opens His lips, and “speaking as never man spake,” gives utterance to the beatitudes, proclaims the laws of His new kingdom, and delivers the high and pure morality of “the Sermon on the Mount.”

To understand the whole significance of the Saviour’s words, we must bear in mind the expectations that were beating in the hearts of that motley crowd which thronged the slopes of the Mount. They were all men who were looking for a great national Deliverer, and a great national deliverance; the kingdom for which they were hungering and thirsting was an earthly monarchy,

free and independent, delivered from the dominion of the Romans, and one which would recall the glories of the ancient rule under David and Solomon. They were no doubt hoping that this great Teacher, whose words were so wondrous, and whose deeds were so mighty, who taught as one having authority, and who acted as one having a more than human power, might prove to be the Messiah they expected: and who should erect His throne on the ruins of the crumbling Roman dynasty, and restore again the kingdom to Israel. Jesus, who knew what was in man, must have known that this hope was beating high in every heart before Him,—and, therefore, to lay the axe at the root of it at once, to show them that His kingdom was not of this world—that it came not from below but from above—that it was not secular but spiritual, not without a man but within—and that all who would partake of its privileges must be subject to His laws, He at once, in His opening words, rebuked the proud and carnal imaginations to which an earthly kingdom was all in all. How astonished they must have been when He lifted up His voice and said: “Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the

kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn : for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek : for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness : for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful : for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart : for they shall see God. Blessed are the peace-makers : for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake : for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad ; for great is your reward in heaven : for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."

Very different this kingdom from that which His hearers had set up as their ideal ; very different this blessedness from any that they were thirsting to secure. And yet in these beatitudes consist real and lasting blessedness for man.

For true blessedness lies not without a man, but within him, not in what we have, but in what we are. "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink ;" not carnal pleasure, or sensual passion,

or earthly ambition, but "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." Is this our conception of happiness? Is it on the attainment of this that our hearts are set? We may admire the saintly character here portrayed in a few graphic touches by a master-hand,—but it is not enough to admire,—we are all "called to be saints," and unless that character be formed in us, it matters little or nothing that we extol the high and pure morality of the "Sermon on the Mount." "The blessed," who are they in the estimation of God? "The poor in spirit," the humble and the contrite: "the mourners," whose greatest grief is their sin: "the meek," who have the mind of Christ: "the hungerers and thirsters after righteousness," whose yearnings are after the holy and the true: "the merciful," who show mercy to others: "the pure in heart," clean in motive, chaste in desire: "the peacemakers," who mediate between the severed, and re-knit broken ties: "the persecuted for righteousness' sake," who esteem the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of the world. Blessed are these: for theirs are the riches of the Kingdom; their tears shall be wiped away by a hand of love: they shall inherit the new earth:

they shall be satisfied with the pleasures that are for evermore: they shall obtain the mercy which they show: they shall see God, and gaze upon the face of the King in His beauty; and great shall be their reward in heaven. Spiritual graces shall have spiritual rewards. In this world they may have little, but in the other world they shall have much.

But there are other points in the "Sermon on the Mount" worthy of consideration.

Jesus tells the multitude before Him that His disciples are made subjects of this spiritual kingdom, not for their own sake alone, but for that of others. They are to be a blessing in the world. There is nothing selfish about true Christianity. All a man's thoughts and efforts are not to be spent on himself; all his hopes and fears are not to be centered round the safety of his own soul. He is saved that he may serve God. He is blessed himself, that he may be a blessing to others. Christians are "the salt of the earth," to keep it from corruption; "the light of the world," to illuminate its darkness; "a city set on a hill," to guide others to those "shining table-lands where God Himself is sun and moon." "Men do not

light a candle and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick, and it giveth light unto all that are in the house." God shines into your heart, that your light may shine in good works before others. Therefore, "let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

In this "Sermon on the Mount," our Lord also explains the nature of His mission, and rescues it from a very prevalent misconception. His enemies, ever ready to carp and cavil at His teaching, and put on it a false conception, accused Him of wishing to subvert the old law given from heaven. He rebukes the charge, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled."

He came to fulfil the ceremonial law. This had been instituted for a peculiar purpose, was intended for a peculiar people, and was only to last for a particular time. It was necessarily transitory in its character. It was framed for the purpose of shadowing forth the doctrines and facts

of the Christian dispensation. By His attention to its rites and ceremonies, and by His accomplishment of all its types; by His obedience to its positive exactments and ordinances our Lord fulfilled it, and in fulfilling brought it to an end for ever. When on the moment that He bowed His head on the cross, and with a loud cry gave up the ghost, the veil of the temple was rent in twain, from the top to the bottom, and its most holy place exposed to public view, the vast and complicated code of the Mosaic ordinances was brought to a close. That which was imperfect was done away, because that which was perfect had come. "The law was a schoolmaster unto Christ," but when Christ appeared, Moses laid aside his office, and resigned his authority, and Christ became "the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth."

But Christ also came to fulfil the moral law.

This He did as none of the sons of men ever did before or since. There was not a flaw in His obedience from the cradle to the cross. In thought, word, and deed, He was absolutely and entirely perfect. "His meat was to do the work of Him that sent Him, and to finish His work." So pure

and faultless was His life, that He could throw down the challenge to His enemies, "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" And all, as it were, with one voice pronounced Him guiltless. "The traitor" confessed, "I have betrayed the innocent blood." The judge acknowledged, "I find in Him no fault at all." And washing his hands before the multitude—as if water could ever take away the crimson stain—protested, "I am innocent of the blood of this just person, see ye to it." Pilate's wife adjured her husband as he sat on the judgment seat, "Have thou nothing to do with that just man." The Centurion who stood at the foot of His cross exclaimed, "Certainly this was a righteous man." While the thief that was crucified with Him acknowledged, "We indeed suffer the due reward of our deeds, but this man hath done nothing amiss." So many are the witnesses to the truth that "He was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." "The Lamb of God without blemish, and without spot." Truly, He came not to destroy the law, not to lower its sanctions, or relax its holiness, nay, rather to exalt the one, and to vindicate the other. "He came not to destroy the law, but to fulfil."

In connection with this truth of the eternal and universal obligation of that moral law which was a transcript of the mind of God, I remark, that the law had never such an exponent of its meaning as Christ. He takes it in His "Sermon on the Mount," out of the region of mere formalism, raises it from "the letter that killeth into the Spirit that giveth life." The Scribes and Pharisees had made righteousness consist in outward observances, in doing, and not doing; in abstaining from forbidden acts, in obedience to certain precepts. But Christ shows that the commandment of God is "exceeding broad." He unfolds the spirituality of its requirements, declares that the state of the heart is all in all in the sight of God; says that there may be murder in an angry feeling, and adultery in a licentious look; and treating the Jewish law of divorce as imperfect, because intended only for a nation in a rudimentary state of training, He brings His hearers back to the original perfection of the marriage relationship. He declares, besides, that the old law of retaliation, "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth," and the law respecting oaths, were now to be superseded by something higher; that the laws of His kingdom

were love and reverence ; and that in loving our enemies, blessing them that curse us, doing good to them that hate us, and praying for them which despitefully use us, and persecute us, we may prove ourselves to be children of our Father in heaven, “ who maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.” “ Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”

Again, that a heart right before God is all in all, that purity of intention is in His sight of the first importance, is farther evident from the Saviour’s words about almsgiving and fasting and prayer. Let nothing be done to be seen of men. Let not the motive to do what is in itself good, be a mere selfish desire to court human approval, or win human applause. Your charities are to be hidden, your fastings concealed, your prayers to be in secret, when the door is closed, and only the Father’s eye upon thee, and the Father’s ear open to thy cry. Nor are your prayers to be filled with “ vain repetitions,” as though God needed such to draw His attention, and as though many words gained His ear, for He is a Father, and ye are His children, and as “ He knows what things ye have

need of, before you ask Him," ye may pray shortly, and simply, assured that you will be heard.

As an example of what prayer should be, earnest, brief, trustful, having a regard to God's glory, as well as our own good, He gives us that model of prayer, "The Lord's Prayer," which begins with the cry, "Our Father," and ends with the ascription of praise, "for Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever."

Further on in this "Sermon on the Mount," Christ urges to the duty of "laying up treasures for ourselves in heaven," for "the heart will be where the treasure is:" to undivided allegiance; for "no man can serve two masters:" to unbounded trust in God: for with such a Father, why be over-anxious about earthly things,—those things which He knows we have need of? Why be unduly careful about a future, which is in His hands, not ours? "The life is more than meat—the body than raiment." He has given the greater gift, can we not trust Him with the less? Consider the fowls of the air—they neither sow nor reap: and yet without harvests they suffer no want: without a barn, they feel no fears.

"Consider the lilies of the field:" look at the

grass springing up beneath your feet; the existence of both is fragile and frail, to-day they are, to-morrow they are not: yet "if God has clothed them with a beauty beyond that of Solomon in all his glory," how shall He not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? "Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself—sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all other things shall be added unto you."

Then follow words, concerning harsh judgments passed on others. "Judge not, that ye be not judged; for with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." Are you faultless yourself? Are you without reproach? Consider. "Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye. Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye, and behold a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye."

But if we are not to attempt the correction of others, when we need correction far more ourselves, indulging it may be in the sins or faults that we condemn; we are to use discretion in distinguishing the character of those with whom we have to do. "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs: neither cast ye your pearls before swine," who at first mistaking them for their natural food—acorns or peas—and afterwards discovering their error, in their blind fury trample under their feet that which, precious though it be, they do not appreciate, and turning against the giver, would "rend" him with their savage tusks. Then in beautiful connection comes the command to pray, and the blessings that flow from prayer. Would you have wisdom to know when to speak, and when to be silent: when to proffer your "holy things," and when to bring out "your pearls;" appeal to Him who "giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not." "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom, if his son ask

bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him."

And if your heavenly Father is so loving and gracious; one ever willing to provide for your wants, and to listen to your cry, prove yourselves to be His children in this; and let this motto be the rule of your lives—"All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets." Nor will you find obedience to these precepts easy, and falling in with the natural current of your desires. The "gate" that I now open to you is "strait," "the way narrow;" but no other gate, or way, leads unto life. "The broad road," travelled by so many because of its easiness and self-indulgence, leadeth down to death. "False prophets" will arise, who, putting on the garb and manners of the sheep, will tell you otherwise, but be not misled by them; try them by their fruits; their doctrines are corrupt, their practices vicious; they are nothing better than barren trees, fit only to be hewn down and cast into the fire.

Remember always that it is not profession, but practice, that I and my Father regard with approval; not the service of the lip, but the service of the heart, that is of worth and value in our sight. "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that *doeth* the will of my Father which is in heaven." "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? and in Thy name have cast out devils? and in Thy name done many wonderful works? But then I will profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." Such are only like "foolish builders on the sand," whose house is "swept away by the flood." Not only hear but do; bring your heart and life into accordance with the expressed will of God, and then you will be like unto "the wise man who built his house upon a rock, and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, and it fell not, for it was founded upon a rock."

Such is a rapid and necessarily very imperfect sketch—for each verse would form material for a separate discourse—of the sermon preached by

Christ on that hill of Galilee ; and as its words of grace and truth fell from His lips, as the King published the laws of His new kingdom, as He brought near its blessings to the sinful, the out-cast, and the poor, no wonder that the people were astonished at His doctrine ; for “ He taught as one having authority, and not as the Scribes.” Well might the people wonder, for He speaks of blessedness, as one who had a right to bless. He expounds the law, as one who had come not to destroy, but to fulfil it. He frees its glorious code of morals from the misconceptions and traditional interpretations of the Scribes. He speaks as God, as one who saw into the very heart, and was acquainted with all its thoughts ; and He declares who they are who shall enter the kingdom of heaven, and who they are who shall be excluded for evermore. As though He were already seated on the throne of judgment, He speaks words of doom, and throws the thoughts of His audience on to a day when, to all who have failed to keep His commandments, He will say, “ I never knew you, depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”

And it is important to remember that through-

out all this scene on that Galilean hill, Christ was not only the prophet proclaiming the blessedness of the heirs of this new kingdom—not only the king declaring its laws, but also the Saviour, who was ready to heal diseases, and cast out devils, and who had “come to seek and to save that which was lost.” Had He not been a Saviour, one who could cleanse from guilt, and remove the curse entailed on sin: and had He not come to “translate us from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God,” it would have been only a bitter mockery to speak to us of blessing, and to disclose the laws of a kingdom from which we were excluded by guilt. And though there is nothing in the “Sermon on the Mount” about atonement, or mediation, or sacrifice, or priesthood, the blessedness of which it speaks is only made possible because the cross rises in the background; because He who uttered the Beatitudes, and spake of a kingdom of righteousness and peace and joy, was infinitely more than a mere moral legislator, was in very truth that which His forerunner proclaimed Him at the outset of his ministry to be, “The Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.”

And so, brethren, this Mountain of the Beatitudes is one of the “Hills which bring us peace ;” for it teaches us that trusting in Christ as the Saviour who has bought us with His blood, and who renews us by His Spirit in the inner man, we shall know the meaning of true blessedness, and that it consists in character ; in conformity to Him who “did no sin, and in whose mouth was found no guile.” And that character, what is it ? See it here in all its aspects. The saints of God are poor in spirit, are meek, are merciful, are pure in heart ; they hunger and thirst after righteousness ; they are peace-makers, and more or less are persecuted for righteousness’ sake. Blessed, thrice blessed are all such ! Not only is there a heaven for them in store, but a heaven for them now : they possess in grace the germ of the future glory ; and of these the Saviour affirms, “Theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

THE
MOUNT OF TRANSFIGURATION.

XI.

THE MOUNT OF TRANSFIGURATION.

“And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart, and was transfigured before them : and His face did shine as the sun, and His raiment was white as the light.”—MATT. xvii. 1, 2.

TABOR, rising abruptly from the north-eastern arm of the plain of Esdraelon, has been given by an early tradition the high honour of being the Mount of the Transfiguration. The tradition dates back so far as the fourth century. Tabor is the highest and fairest mountain of Galilee, and rises in an almost perfect cone from the plain, remarkable among the bare and rugged hills of Palestine for the verdure which climbs to its very summit. It is formed of the peculiar limestone of the country, and lies about six miles due east from Nazareth. Though unnamed in the New, it is of frequent commemoration in the Old Testament. Here the northern tribes gathered under Barak

and here Zebah and Zalmunna slew the brothers of Gideon, each of whom resembled the children of a king. Of this mountain spake the prophet when he said, that "surely as Tabor is among the mountains, and Carmel by the sea," God's judgments should come; and of this mountain sang David when, speaking of the greatness of God, he said, "The north and the south Thou hast created them; Tabor and Hermon shall rejoice in Thy name."

Though the idea prevailed widely among the early Christians that Tabor was the scene of the Transfiguration, yet modern travellers assert that there is strong and decisive evidence against this view. It is said that the summit of the mountain was employed, without any interruption, between the times of Antiochus the Great, B.C. 218, and the destruction of Jerusalem under Vespasian, as a stronghold garrisoned with soldiers, and was by no means the scene of peace and solitude whither one would flee anxious to escape the turmoil of the world. The quiet which isolation and seclusion give was only attained after the town and fortress which once crowned its summit had become a ruin. It is impossible,

therefore, that Tabor can have been the “high mountain” to which the Lord retired, that He with His three disciples might be there “apart by themselves.”

Some think that Hermon, which towers high above all the other hills of Palestine, and which is the culminating point of the Anti-Libanus range, and whose sides in the burning heat of summer are covered with snow, was the scene of this memorable event. But whatever mountain it was, the glory and the grandeur of the Transfiguration are the same, and the lessons it teaches remain unaffected and untouched.

At the close of a day of toil, the Lord takes with Him the three disciples favoured above the rest, Peter and John and James, who were afterwards to be witnesses of His agony in the garden, and who were now to be forearmed against the trying scenes of His approaching passion. It was probably night when Jesus took them apart; and if so, the splendour of the vision must have been greatly enhanced, though no doubt the transcendent brightness would have paled even the light of the noonday sun. As He prayed, the fashion of His countenance was altered, and He

was transfigured before them : His face did shine as the sun, and His raiment was white and glittering—"became shining," St Mark says, "exceeding white as snow, so as no fuller on earth can white them."

Whilst thus "clothed with light as with a garment," behold there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with Him, who also appeared in glory ; and the subject of their discourse was "the decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem." The three disciples, unable to bear the burden of this scene, became heavy with sleep, and when they were awake,—or rather, "having kept themselves awake throughout,"—saw, whether in the body or out of the body they could not tell, "His glory, and the two men that stood with Him." Peter, not knowing what he said, rapt into an ecstasy—being out of himself,—exclaimed, "Lord, it is good for us to be here : if Thou wilt, let us make three tabernacles, one for Thee, one for Moses, and one for Elias." This proposal, as St Luke informs us, he made as the two heavenly visitants departed from their Lord. Peter would have detained them ; for the converse was all too brief, the glimpses of the heavenly glory all too

transient. Why should the bright and blessed vision be withdrawn so soon as granted? why should the sweet conversation and fellowship be at an end almost as soon as vouchsafed?

“But while he yet spake, behold a bright cloud overshadowed them,”—not His disciples, but Moses and Elias and the Lord,—and veiled them in its intolerable brightness from the view of the mortal men who stood outside its radiance. The disciples “feared” as the Saviour and the two holy saints “entered into the cloud,” awed by the near presence of heaven; and out of the cloud came a voice—the same which had once before been heard at His baptism—“This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him.” Not able to endure the awfulness of God speaking with man, “they fell on their faces, and were sore afraid.” Jesus came and touched them, laid on them the tender hand, and spake in their ears the reassuring words, “Be not afraid;” “and when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only.”

Such are the several incidents of the Transfiguration. Let us now look at some of the truths which we may learn from this glorious scene.

I shall, in the first instance, consider the scope and the intention of the Transfiguration. Why was it that He, who was “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief”—who had so shortly to pass over the brook Cedron into the garden of Gethsemane—who was so soon to be crowned with thorns, covered with shame and spitting, should have this brief moment of glory? Primarily for His own sake. We can understand how for the Lord himself the Transfiguration with its attendant glory, the appearance of His beatified saints, and the solemn announcement of His sonship by the Father, had a high significance. It would refresh Him in the midst of trouble. It would strengthen Him against the coming day of agony. It would nerve Him to meet the horror of the hour and power of darkness, which were so close at hand. As the inward splendour broke forth, as the voice from heaven fell upon His ear, He would be more fully conscious that He already possessed the glory which one day should be His in all its manifested power and surpassing brightness.

But not for His own sake merely did this scene upon the Mount take place. There was in it a purpose of mercy and grace to the disciples.

It was intended for the confirmation of their faith. We learn this from the place which it holds in the narrative. It stands in close connection with the first announcement which the Saviour made to His disciples of His sufferings, rejection, and death. Thus we read in the 16th chapter of St Matthew's Gospel, and at the 21st verse—"From that time forth began Jesus to show unto His disciples how that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and raised again the third day." This announcement greatly surprised the disciples, and filled them with alarm. Peter, indeed, was so startled that he began to rebuke our Lord—"This shall not be unto Thee." But Jesus at once sternly reproves His disciple, and plainly telling him that all who would follow Him must take up their cross, puts the solemn question, "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" He then adds, "For the Son of man shall come in the glory of His Father, with His angels, and then He shall reward every man according to his

works. Verily I say unto you, there be some standing here which shall not taste of death till they see the Son of man coming in His kingdom." Now these words, in the three evangelists who record the event, St Matthew, St Mark, and St Luke, immediately precede the account of the Transfiguration. "And after six days, Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart, and was transfigured before them." Is there any connection between the glory of the Transfiguration, and the prediction which just goes before, "There be some standing here which shall not taste of death till they see the Son of man coming in His kingdom?"

I think there is. It cannot be said that His transfiguration completely fulfils the language, "the Son of man coming in His kingdom"—"the kingdom of God coming with power," which latter expression is the phrase of St Luke. "The coming" of which Christ here speaks, in its most exhaustive meaning, refers to the time when "in His own glory, and in the glory of His Father, and in the glory of the holy angels, He

shall appear to reward every man according to his works."

But the Transfiguration, though not fulfilling this prediction, and by no means satisfying its grandeur, was a prelude and prophecy of Christ's coming the second time without sin unto salvation. It was an image of His future kingdom, a type of what then should happen; and, regarded as a pledge of that which should be hereafter, we may see in its glory a fulfilment of the words, "Verily I say unto you, there be some standing here which shall not taste of death till they see the Son of man coming in His kingdom."

You will remember that when Peter, in the 1st chapter of his Second Epistle, and at the 16th verse, alludes to the Transfiguration, he connects it with the glorious advent of the Son of man. "For we have not followed cunningly-devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye-witnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to Him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came

from heaven we heard when we were with Him in the holy Mount."

When therefore the three favoured disciples, who had just heard of the sufferings of Christ, and also of the kingdom which was His, saw on the Mount a prophetic glimpse of the glory to be revealed, their faith would be strengthened, their hearts reassured, and they would have a shield against the tribulation which should presently arise. That vision on the holy Mount could not have been lost either upon themselves or others; and they must have left that scene of glory, where a wondrous light had burst on their eyes, and wondrous words had fallen upon their ears, like "giants refreshed with new wine."

But let us now look at the aspects in which the Transfiguration was a prelude and prophecy of Christ's coming in power.

And first, we have the personal glory of the Saviour. On the Mount He appeared arrayed in light from head to foot, clothed with a transcendent brightness, the inner glory bursting forth until it overflowed with its radiance the very garments which He wore. "His face did shine as the sun; His raiment became shining, exceeding white as

snow, so as no fuller on earth can white them.” Now it is in such glory that the Saviour shall “appear the second time without sin unto salvation;” such shall be the ineffable radiance,—the bright and burning splendour of His person. So He appeared to St John in Patmos. “His head and His hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes were as a flame of fire, and His feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned as a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters. And His countenance was as the sun shining in His strength.” All traces of sorrow and humiliation shall disappear; the crown of thorns shall be replaced by the crown of the universe, and the mocking reed by the sceptre of power; and such shall be His majesty, that “every knee shall bow before Him, and every tongue confess that He is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

A second feature of resemblance between the Transfiguration and the coming of the kingdom of God with power, is to be seen in the saints who appeared with Jesus on the holy Mount. These were “Moses and Elias.” When Christ comes again, He will bring all His saints with Him, ten

thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, in numbers countless as the stars which shine in the midnight sky, or as the dew-drops which are born from the womb of the morning.

The buried saints shall be raised, for "them that sleep in Jesus God will bring with Him at His coming;" and the living saints shall be translated, for "we which are alive and remain shall be caught up to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord." Now, what more accurate prophecy of these two events—the raising of the dead, and the translation of the living—could be given to us than the appearance of Moses and Elias in the Transfiguration on the Mount? With regard to Elias or Elijah, the place which he holds in this typical scene is manifest. "He was translated that he should not see death." There swept down from the firmament the chariot of fire and the horses of fire, and the prophet passed in all the integrity of manhood in his triumphal car into the presence of God. Hence he appears in the Mount in his own body, that body having never passed into the grave, or seen corruption. I look upon him,

therefore, as the representative of that class of the Lord's people who shall never die, but who shall be on the earth when the sign of the Son of man shall appear in the heavens, and the Saviour shall descend with the voice of the archangel and the trump of God, to be "glorified in His saints, and admired in all them that believe."

"For behold I show you a mystery : we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump." In the case of some believers, mortality shall be swallowed up of life. "They shall not be unclothed, but clothed upon with their house, which is from heaven ;" and like Elias, they shall be translated in the body to the glories of the kingdom "prepared for the righteous from the foundation of the world."

If Elias is a type of the saints who shall never see death, Moses is a type of the saints who are to rise from the dead, and to be partakers of the blessedness of the first resurrection. Though Moses died and was buried, yet he appears in his glorified body on the Mount of Transfiguration.

We have seen in a former lecture that there was

something very mysterious in the narrative of the death and burial of Moses. We read in the 5th and 6th verses of the last chapter of the book of Deuteronomy, that "Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord. And He buried him in a valley," or in a gorge, "in the land of Moab, over against Beth-peor; but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day." It is not a sufficient reason for this ignorance on the part of the Israelites as to the burial-place of their great leader, lawgiver, and prophet, to say that God designedly concealed it from their knowledge, lest they should make it the scene of idolatrous worship. For although the exact spot where Moses was entombed was hidden from the people, yet was it sufficiently well defined—"a gorge in the land of Moab, over against Beth-peor"—for any superstitious purpose, had there been wish or desire to offer religious homage at the grave of the dead. I rather think that the Israelites were ignorant of his sepulchre, because no sooner had Moses tasted of death, than his body was withdrawn from the grave, and from the dominion of him "that had the power of death, that is the devil." And this may throw

light upon that mysterious passage in Jude, where we read that Michael the Archangel and the devil had a dispute about the body of Moses, the former wishing to exempt it from the law of corruption, the latter claiming that it should undergo the sentence, "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return."

Thus, when Moses stood upon the Mount in his glorified body, evidence was given that those who have died in the Lord shall rise to the life immortal at the second advent of Christ.

Pointing to the shining form of Moses on Tabor, we may say, "So also is the resurrection of the dead; it is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body."

We see, then, what an accurate prelude we have here on the Mount to "the coming of the kingdom of God with power."

The disciples not only see the Saviour clothed with the splendour which shall be His when He shall be "revealed from heaven," but they see Him attended by a saint who had been translated

and a saint who had been raised, representatives of that faithful company which shall be gathered unto Him in the Great Day, when He makes up His jewels.

But I have not yet exhausted the completeness of the type on which I have been speaking.

The Transfiguration offers an illustration of the millennial day in respect to the distinction between the Church in glory and the tenants of the renovated earth. When the Saviour comes, and the times of the restitution of all things have been introduced, He shall gather all His faithful people to Himself, whether living or dead, and these shall form "the Bride," "the Lamb's wife," wedded to Him in eternal espousals at the marriage altar of heaven. This done, He shall then "destroy with the brightness of His appearing" all the ungodly among the nations that profess Christianity; apostate Christendom, in fact, with the impenitent, the unbelieving—all who "know not God, and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." But besides these two classes, the living who are "walking with God," and who shall be caught up to meet their descending Lord, and the living who are denying the

faith, and come under the swift judgments of the Son of man, there shall be two other classes on the earth at the Advent. These are, the heathen, who have not “heard His fame, neither have seen His glory;” and the Jews, restored to their own land, and converted by His appearing, as Saul of Tarsus was as he journeyed to Damascus. For Saul was a type of that portion of his nation who will be converted only by seeing the Lord Jesus, and who, as they “look upon Him whom they have pierced, shall mourn as one mourneth for an only son, and be in bitterness as one that is in bitterness for his first-born.” And this sheds a light on the meaning of Paul’s words to Timothy—“Howbeit, for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting.” Now both these classes, the heathen who have not heard of Christ, and the Jews settled in their own land, when the Deliverer shall come out of Zion, shall be brought to the saving knowledge of Christ, Israel’s salvation being as “life from the dead” to the Gentiles, and they shall people the world, and dwell in the new earth during the thousand

years of millennial bliss. With regard to the glorified saints—the elect of this dispensation—the New Jerusalem, the city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God, shall be their home. There, and there alone, is death utterly destroyed, the crowns of heaven worn, the songs of heaven sung, the glory of heaven enjoyed, and the joys of heaven known. There it is that the voice of harpers harping with their harps is heard, and the saints “stand on the sea of glass mingled with fire, and sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and of the Lamb.”

But while the Lord and His Church are thus in glory reigning in the city in which God himself is Sun and Moon, the nations, who are now all righteous, and all of whom “know the Lord, from the least to the greatest,” shall dwell upon the renewed earth, at length “delivered from the bondage of corruption,” the groans of creation ended, its pangs and its travail past, and nature rejoicing in the sunshine of an imperishable spring. The nations of them that are saved shall walk in the light of the heavenly city, “and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory and honour unto it.” Of this blessed time the scene

on the Mount of Transfiguration was a striking prophecy. Christ and His two glorified saints—representatives of the Church of the first-born—are seen robed in a splendour surpassing that of the sun; the three disciples—representatives of holy men in the flesh—are permitted to gaze on the radiant manifestation, and to stand in its brilliant light; for heaven and earth shall be again wedded together in a close and visible communion, as in the old days of paradise. The millennial dispensation shall be the bridal of the earth and sky. “The tabernacle of God will be with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people; and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.” Happy season! Blessed period! Throughout the length and breadth of the regenerated world “nothing shall be seen but joy and gladness, nothing heard but thanksgiving and the voice of melody.” Now when you reflect upon these several points of resemblance between the Transfiguration and the events that shall take place at the second Advent, we have warrant for saying that our Lord intended His words to refer to the scene on the holy Mount when He said, “Verily I say unto you, there be

some standing here which shall not taste of death till they see the kingdom of God come with power."

The truths I have brought before you are not the only ones that we learn from the Mount of Transfiguration. One or two other lessons remain to be gathered, and to these I shall as briefly as possible direct your attention.

The unity of the Old and New Testaments, and the inferiority of the Old to the New, are strikingly attested in the appearance of the two representatives, the one of the law, the other of the prophets, and in the fact that after their testimony is given they disappear, while Jesus only remains. Moses and Elias, the law and the prophets, lay down their offices at the feet of the Messiah, the former giving witness that Christ is "the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth," the latter putting his seal to the truth that "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." And as we see these two men standing with Christ on the holy Mount, we learn that Jesus is that promised Messiah who was shadowed forth in a thousand types, and sung of in a thousand prophecies; that "He came not to destroy the

law, but to fulfil ;” and that the Old Covenant, with all its mystic rites and ceremonies, was but preparatory to the Christian—to that unclouded sunshine of truth which was shed upon the world by Him “who brought life and immortality to light by the gospel.” And when from out the bright cloud, “dark with excess of light,” which overshadowed the legislator and the prophet and their Lord, there came the voice, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, hear ye Him,” we are taught that henceforth Christ is to be the sole Prophet of His Church. “God, who in sundry times and in divers manners spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son.” That Moses, or the law, has passed away, that being “the shadow of good things to come,” while Christ is “the substance of these good things,”—that Elias, or the prophets, has passed away, for in Christ all prophecy is fulfilled, is farther made manifest from the fact that when “the voice that came from the excellent glory” was silent, and the fear that smote the three disciples to the earth had vanished under the

touch of the Saviour's hand, they, "lifting up their eyes, saw no man, save Jesus only."

I must offer a remark or two on the subject of the august conference held on the Mount by the Lord and His two saints in glory.

Did they speak of the glories of the heaven which Moses and Elias had just left; its crowns, its thrones, its sceptres, its crystal floor, its golden streets, its jasper walls? Not so. In this hour when Christ was transfigured, and clothed with dazzling light, and there was a breaking forth of the inner splendour, "they spake of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem." And why, in this hour of His glory, did He speak of His death; of the shame and the humiliation and anguish of Calvary? Because His decease should fulfil all the types of the law, and all the oracles of the prophets. Because "through death He should destroy him that had the power of death," and, "triumphing over principalities and powers, make a show of them openly on His cross." Because "through His death He should open the kingdom of heaven to all believers," magnify all the attributes of God, meet all the necessities of man, and give the last and fullest

expression to His own perfections and to His Father's love. Since therefore His death vindicated justice, exalted mercy, "made an end of sin, and brought in an everlasting righteousness, which is unto all and upon all that believe," no wonder that when Moses and Elias appeared with Him in glory, they should "speak of His decease, which He should accomplish at Jerusalem."

But we must now descend from the holy Mount; and if we only learn from it something of the glory of the Saviour, and of the things which "He has prepared for them that love Him," it is truly "one of the Hills that bring us peace." We might wish to remain on the Mount with the august visitors, feeling "it is good for us to be there," "good" to look into the marvels of the higher world, and to enjoy a foretaste of the heavenly glory.

But we must leave the holy scene, and return to the common earth with its sins and sorrows, its toils and cares, and face and front the evil that is on every side. Still we need not descend alone. We have Jesus with us as much as the disciples had: He is always near to those who seek His face. He is "a friend that sticketh closer

than a brother ;” “about our path and about our bed, and spying out all our ways.” Let us rejoice in Jesus, and in Jesus only, and making Him the all-in-all of faith and hope and joy, look forward to the time when, having ceased to walk by faith, we shall walk by sight, seeing Him face to face, and “knowing Him even as we are known.” Then transfigured ourselves, and reflecting His likeness, we shall enter upon that “inheritance which is incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away,” and enjoy the full fruition of the Triune God and of all the redeemed, standing in that presence where “is fulness of joy, and at that right hand, where are pleasures for evermore.”

And if, as Anselm says, “if the contemplation of Christ’s glorified manhood so filled the apostle with joy that he was unwilling to be sundered from it, how shall it fare with them who attain to the contemplation of His glorious Godhead?

And if it was so good a thing to dwell with two of His saints, how then to come to the heavenly Jerusalem, “to the general assembly and Church of the first-born that are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to

these, not seen through a glass darkly, but face to face?"

Oh the glory of that beatific vision! I think that as the saint stands on the threshold of heaven, within the gate of pearl, and as the uncreated throne bursts upon his view, he will "see Jesus only,"—no other object, however splendid or beautiful, will divide his attention; and passing down the shining ranks of angels that line his way to the august Presence, he will, when he reaches His Saviour and His God, fall down before His footstool with the rapturous cry, "It is good for me to be here!" And THIS—THIS is heaven!

OLIVET,

THE MOUNT OF WATCHING, OF WEEPING, AND
ASCENSION.

XII.

OLIVET.

“Jesus went unto the Mount of Olives.”—JOHN viii. 1.

OLIVET, or the Mount of Olives, is a ridge of rather more than a mile in length, running in general direction north and south, covering the whole eastern side of the city. At its northern end the ridge bends round to the west, so as to form an enclosure to the city on that side also. But whereas on the north a space of nearly a mile of tolerably level surface intervenes between the walls of the city and the rising ground, on the east the Mount is close to the walls, parted only by that which, from the city itself, seems no parting at all—the narrow ravine of the Cedron. The eastern part of the mountain is not very much above the city, three hundred feet higher than the Temple Mount, hardly more than one hundred above the so-called Zion. The olives

and oliveyards which clothed the rounded and swelling sides of this limestone hill, and from which it derived its name, were more abundant in earlier times than at present, "where only in the deeper and more secluded slope leading up to the northernmost summit, these venerable trees spread into anything like a forest."

This mountain is connected with some of the most interesting and significant events of the history of the Old Testament and the New: it was the scene of the flight of David, and the triumphant progress of the son of David, of the idolatry of Solomon, and the agony and betrayal of Christ.

It was on one of the rocky ledges of this mountain, immediately over against the temple, that our Lord sat as the purple shadows of evening were gathering over the city, and the last rays of the sun were sinking in the west, and foretold the final doom of Jerusalem in words that embrace within their far-reaching grasp of meaning the end of this dispensation. It was on one of the wild uplands which overhang Bethany that He withdrew finally from the eyes of His disciples, and soaring heavenward, returned to

“the glory which He had with the Father before the world was.”

We see, then, that several incidents in the life of Christ are connected with the Mount of Olives, and these I shall take up in their order, hoping that as we draw from it the instruction of which it is so full, we shall find it to be one of “the Hills that bring peace.”

Taking the last verse of the 7th chapter of St John’s Gospel, and connecting it with the 1st verse of the 8th chapter, the words run, as they ought to do, without any break, thus—“And every man went unto his own house—Jesus went unto the Mount of Olives.”

There is a passage parallel to this in the 37th verse of the 21st chapter of St Luke’s Gospel—“And in the day-time He was teaching in the temple; and at night He went out and abode in the mount that is called the Mount of Olives.” And why was this? Why did He withdraw, as the shades of evening gathered over city and village and plain, to the solitary seclusion of Olivet? Why, when “every man went unto his own house,” and sought its happy and friendly shelter, why did Jesus go “unto the Mount of Olives?”

Was it that He was homeless and houseless—that as He said Himself, touchingly and plaintively, “The foxes had holes, and the birds of the air had nests, but the Son of man had not where to lay His head?” I think not. In the early part of this Gospel we read that after the Baptist’s testimony, when standing on the banks of Jordan he said, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world,” two of John’s disciples followed Jesus, and put to Him the question, “Rabbi, where dwellest Thou?” And Jesus answered, “Come and see. Then they came and saw where He dwelt, and abode with Him that day, for it was about the tenth hour.” So that the Lord must have had some dwelling-place; not a home, indeed, for He was always traversing the towns and villages of Judea and Galilee—always journeying through the length and breadth of the land on errands of mercy and love, intent upon the work which brought Him from heaven to earth. He had some dwelling-place to which, as the day closed in, He might retire. And we know, moreover, that Bethany, the home of Mary and Martha and Lazarus, was ever open to Him, and offered Him always a quiet and

congenial retreat, and the welcome sympathy of loving friends. Why then, when the busy day was ended, and the night came to suspend for the time His works and words of divine compassion and doctrine, did He retire to the lonely mountain-top, and spend there the hours till the morning broke again over the earth, and roused men to the toil and conflict and duties of life?

The answer is, that He might pray. It is recorded by St Luke, that before He chose the twelve disciples, "He went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God." The Mount of Olives was His oratory. The sun that left Him on His knees when it set in the west, found Him on His knees when it dawned again in the east. And why these long nights of prayer? Not that He might set us an example, and so illustrate His own words, that "men ought always to pray and not to faint." If this were all, it would stamp His prayers with a certain unreality, it would deprive them of that intensity which must have characterised them, as "He offered them up with strong crying and tears unto His Father in heaven." The Son of man prays, because He feels the need of prayer. We must

always keep in mind that Christ was as truly, naturally, and really man as one of ourselves; that He was exercised by an experience of all human infirmities—suffering, weeping, struggling, “tempted in all points like as we are, and yet without sin.” We must ascribe to our Lord the fulness of humanity, and the reality of human feelings and sympathies.

Nor must we think that in any time of conflict or temptation, in any circumstance of trouble or emergency, He called in the divine nature to the support of the human. This were to remove Him in times of need out of sympathy with ourselves, who have no such aid on which to lean. He were not true Brother to us at all if He did not require the support drawn from prayer, the courage and the wisdom and the strength which we get at a throne of grace, when we come there to “ask for mercy, and to obtain help in time of need.”

Again and again we are told of the dependence of the Son upon His Father. It is said that He could “do nothing of Himself, but what He saw the Father do;” that “the works which He did were not His own, but the Father’s;” that “the

words which He spoke, He spoke not of Himself." And therefore prayer was to Him precisely the same as it is to us—a refuge in time of sorrow, strength in times of weakness, light in times of darkness, victory in times of temptation.

The garden of Gethsemane, with its thrice-offered supplication—"Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt," tells us this; for there is an intensity of earnestness in those cries and tears which shows that the prayer thrilled up from a soul "exceeding sorrowful even unto death." And "He was heard, in that He feared." The cup did not pass away, but the strength to drain it out to the dregs was given. And rising up with calmness from His knees, He went forth to meet His enemies with undaunted courage, saying to those who would have defended Him with the sword—"The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" He knew the value, He felt the power of prayer; and nothing can so teach us the worth of the apostle's precepts, "Pray without ceasing: continue instant in prayer," as to think of those nights of prayer, those lonely watches on the hill-top under the clear heavens, as

to recall the touching statement, "Every man went unto his own house: Jesus went unto the Mount of Olives."

I do not forget, that beside the need that Jesus felt of prayer, there was the pleasure which He experienced in those sacred and solitary night communings with God. It must have been with a true and vivid delight that He turned from "the contradiction of sinners," from the unbelief of His disciples, from their misconception and earthly-mindedness, to the Father, in whose bosom He had been from the beginning, who knew all that was in His heart, and whose will He came to do. It must have been a relief to unburden Himself to the Holy One who comprehended His motives, His principles, the work before Him, the mighty results to be achieved by His obedience unto death, and by His resurrection from the dead. Misunderstood by man, He was thoroughly known of God. What a pleasure, then, must He have had in communion with the Father! How it must have been His very joy, when the night came on, and the stars of God looked calmly down from unclouded skies, to retire to the shades of the hoary olives, and there, until the morning broke

over the earth, to hold that near, close, free and frank communion with His Father which forms the rapture of the saints above.

And if these solitary communions with God formed the happiness of Jesus on earth—if fellowship with God be the chief element of the blessedness of the upper world, surely they who have the mind of Christ, and meetness for heaven, will find their truest pleasure in it now; not merely because they feel wants which need to be supplied, but because they delight in communion with a Father to whom they can say in the glad spirit of adoption, “Abba,” and whom to know as reconciled to us in the face of Jesus Christ is in very deed eternal life. And this truth I gather from the simple but very touching record of the evangelist, that when “every man went unto his own house, Jesus went unto the Mount of Olives.”

The Mount of Olives is connected with another incident in our Saviour’s life. I refer you to Luke xix. and the 41st verse—“And when He was come near, He beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine

eyes. For the days shall come upon thee that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another, because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation."

Our Lord is coming from Bethany, where He had rested the night before in the house of His loving friends Martha and Mary and Lazarus. It is the time of the Paschal Feast, and a crowd of pilgrims is going to the Holy City to be present at the great festival.

In the morning Jesus sets out on His last journey to Jerusalem. His way lies over the southern shoulder of the mountain, between the summit which contains the tombs of the prophets, and that called the "Mount of Offence;" for by this path mounted travellers and large caravans always approach the city from Jericho. He is attended by a crowd of people who had assembled at Bethany on the previous night, and who had been with Him when He called Lazarus out of his grave, and raised him from the dead. Impressed by the mighty miracle, and filled with

enthusiasm, they follow Jesus, and form part of His triumphant train. From Jerusalem a rejoicing throng streams forth to meet Jesus, and these, with green branches of palms in their hands, which they had cut down on their way, move towards Bethany with loud shouts of welcome.

The two streams of this vast concourse of people meet on the ridge, where first on the road from Bethany begins "the descent of the Mount of Olives" towards Jerusalem. From this point Mount Zion is seen, and that portion of Jerusalem called from the site of the palace of David, "the city of David," though the temple and the portions lying to the north are still hidden from view by the slopes of Olivet on the right. It is at this point that the old prophet's words receive their fulfilment—"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: He is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass."

The road is strewn with branches of palms, and covered with the garments of the rejoicing crowd, who make a carpet for their now acknowledged King—"Hosanna!" they cry, "blessed is the

King of Israel, that cometh in the name of the Lord;" "peace on earth, and glory in the highest!"

It was a glorious hour for His mother and His disciples; it was a brilliant if brief triumph. This act of homage, this reception of Jesus, must have filled their hearts with an anticipation of certain victory and conquest, and Mary must have rejoiced at the honour now at length shown to her divine Son. The angel's words may have come thrilling to her mind—"He shall be great, and He shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David: and He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end."

The procession advances in royal state to the capital. In a few moments it reaches a ledge of smooth rock at the top of a rugged ascent, and the city, "beautiful for situation, and the joy of the whole earth," bursts into view, with its temple and its terraces, its houses and its palaces, its walls and watchtowers and gardens, all bathed in the golden morning light. There is a pause in the triumphant march. As the magnificent city

lies before Him in all its grandeur and beauty, and the hum of its busy life is borne faintly to His ears, the heart of Jesus is filled with sorrow, and the hot and burning tears rush up to His eyes at the sight. Even while the echoes of the loud “Hosannas!” which proclaim Him King, are still floating on the joyous air, the wail of sorrow bursts from His lips, and He cries, “If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.”

From many thoughts suggested by this touching scene—Jesus weeping over Jerusalem—the first I place before you is this—the cause of the Redeemer’s tears. Why did Jesus weep? He saw the approaching desolation of the Holy City, the destruction of her temple; He knew that the time was coming when the Roman legions should beset her walls, and the din of battle be heard in her streets, and the fire should wrap her houses in flames, and her foundations be turned up by the cruel ploughshare, and He might have wept as a patriot, to whom the altars and hearths of His native land were dearer than His own life, animated by the spirit of him who, as he thought

with anguish on the doom which awaited his country, exclaimed with deep and impassioned fervour, "Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughters of my people!" But Christ was more than a patriot, or rather He was, in the true meaning of the word, a Patriot indeed; for He felt an unselfish interest not only in the temporal but in the eternal welfare of His kinsman according to the flesh; He looked beyond the massacre and the carnage, the famine and the exile and the dispersion, which were in store for the guilty nation, to the far more awful and overwhelming destruction which awaited those whose condemnation was this—"They loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." There was the depth of a divine despair in the tears of Jesus. They appear to me to seal the doom of the impenitent. They tell me, that though He can pity, even He cannot save those who "sin wilfully after they have received the knowledge of the truth." For if He were able, why not prevent the coming doom? Why weep, when He can rescue? His tears speak of His helplessness to

avert judgment from the impenitent. I cannot imagine for a moment that He would weep over misery which He had the power to prevent; that He would weep if it rested with Himself to put an end to the cause which called forth His tears. Brethren, there is something very awful, very alarming in the tears of Jesus. They bear testimony that it is possible to sin past recovery; that there is a time in the course of the impenitent when even love, pity, and grief can do nothing to deliver, and vengeance must take its destined course.

They warn us against presuming on the mercy and compassion of God, against cherishing the belief that although to the last we may “do despite to the spirit of grace,” the love of God will interfere to rescue us from the condemnation which our sins have provoked. Nothing so convinces me that suffering will follow upon sin, that eternal misery will be the portion of those who reject the mercy of God and neglect the great salvation, as to see the Saviour weeping over the doomed Jerusalem, and saying with a piteous and agonising cry, “Oh that thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the

things that belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes."

I learn another truth from Jesus weeping. It is this—the possibility of outliving the season of grace. It was so with the Jews. Though their temple was standing, and the ordinances of their religion carried on; though their priests still ministered at the altar, and the Saviour still taught in their streets, they had passed beyond the limits where repentance was possible, their day of grace had closed for ever. This may be the case still. Though Bibles are still open, and the gospel is still preached; though the wells of salvation are unsealed, and living waters flow abundantly forth; though there is room in heaven, and many are passing into the kingdom, it is possible that for some the accepted time may be gone never to return. Appalling condition! The day of life longer than the day of grace! A man doomed to the second death before he has tasted of the first! For "God's Spirit will not always strive with man." Christ will not always "stand at the door" of the heart, knocking for admission. The sentence of death shall go forth, "Ephraim has turned to idols, let him alone." They shall

“sleep on now, and take their rest,” and nothing shall disturb them more, neither promise nor warning, neither law nor gospel, neither providence nor grace. “He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the Son of God.” What a voice of urgency this truth should have for us, piercing our ears, and stirring our hearts with the words, “To-day, while it is called to-day, harden not your hearts !” And the summons, “Behold, now is the accepted time,” comes to us with a new force ; the exhortation, “Seek ye the Lord while He may be found ; call upon Him while He is near,” is fraught with a new meaning as we see Jesus weeping over the Holy City, and hear Him saying, in a voice choked with passionate emotion, “If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace ! but now they are hid from thine eyes.”

There is another incident in the life of our Lord and Master connected with Olivet—the Ascension.

In the 24th chapter of St Luke’s Gospel, and at the 50th verse, we read these words—“He led them out as far as to Bethany, and He lifted up His hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass,

while He blessed them, He was parted from them, and carried up into heaven."

And we read in the 1st chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, that after the last interview between the risen Lord and His disciples had taken place, and they with upturned faces and straining eyes had watched their Divine Master as He went up towards heaven, until a cloud received Him out of their sight,—when all was over, and the King had entered the everlasting doors, "they returned unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a Sabbath day's journey."

Very beautiful, very encouraging, is the account of the Ascension. All is so calm, so solemn, so soothing. There is no disturbance of the elements, no whirlwind, no chariot of fire, no horses of fire as in the instance of Elijah; nothing to dazzle or confound; only the lifted hands, extended in priestly benediction, and the lips parted in words of blessing. Calmly and majestically He ascends, carrying with Him that body with which He had risen from the grave.

What a worthy close to the life He had spent on earth! He had come to bless the world: He

had blessed it by His life, and by His death, and by His resurrection; and now, as He leaves the world to enter within the veil, His hands are extended in blessing, and words of blessing are the last that He utters. No wonder that the disciples, who had seen the extended hands and heard the parting benediction, should “worship Him, and return to Jerusalem with great joy,” and remain continually in the temple, “praising and blessing God.”

The Ascension was the crowning act in the life of the Saviour: it transcends in dignity and honour all other preceding events. When He “ascended up on high, He led captivity captive, and received gifts for men,” and sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high, “as King of kings, and Lord of lords.” God gave Him the throne of glory in heaven, and placed in His hands the sceptre of the universe, and made Him supreme Lord of heaven and earth and hell, and crowned Him with that triple crown so blasphemously claimed by the head of the Roman Church,—“angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him.” We can now regard Him as the King of Glory, “Head over all things to the Church, which is His body,

the fulness of Him that filleth all in all," and see in His glorification a pledge and earnest of the glorification of His people ; for He has gone to prepare a place for us, and when all the purposes of His mediatorial kingdom are fulfilled, " He will come again to receive us unto Himself, that where He is, there we may be also."

The ascension of Christ assures us that we have, not only a King sitting on the Throne of Grace, but a High Priest as well, who " has passed within the veil, there to appear before God for us," and to carry forward the work of mediation ; for having died for us once, He now lives for us evermore. He who opened a way for us to the Father keeps it open for us still, so that it is not closed by our sins ; for " if any man sin, he has an Advocate, Jesus Christ the righteous," who is " able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by Him, seeing that He ever liveth to make intercession for them."

The ascension of Christ is connected with the gift of the Holy Spirit. " It is expedient for you that I go away ; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you ; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you."

Without the gift of the Spirit redemption could not have been applied to the soul, and man could not have been renewed after the divine likeness, and restored to the image of God. It is the Spirit who convinces of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment; who quickens, enlightens, purifies, strengthens, and comforts, and who takes of the things of Christ, and showing them to the soul, makes Christ to a believer “the chiefest among ten thousand, and the altogether lovely.”

The Ascension is a motive to heavenly-mindedness. If our Lord be precious to us, “fairer than the children of men,” our thoughts and affections will rise to the place whither He is gone before. “Where our treasure is, there will our heart be also.” Christ is our treasure, and He is in heaven; let us therefore “in heart and mind with Him thither ascend, and with Him continually dwell,” “seeking those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God.”

Difficult it is in the midst of this busy world, with all its interests and employments, its struggles and fears and joys, to remember that “our citizenship is in heaven;” but if we love the unseen Saviour—if, “believing in Him, we rejoice

with joy unspeakable and full of glory," then shall we ever "seek *first* the kingdom of God and His righteousness," and forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, we shall press towards the mark for the prize "of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

And not only so, but His ascension will always be connected with another thought, that of His coming again. "This same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven." He shall return to the earth which He has left for a time, the "gates shall again lift up their heads," and "the everlasting doors" shall be opened, and "the King of Glory shall come forth," to be "glorified in His saints, and admired in all them that believe." And "His feet shall stand on that day on the Mount of Olives;" and though so terrible will be His advent that heaven and earth shall pass away before its awful splendour, and the impenitent shall call upon the rocks and mountains to hide them from His presence, yet shall He come with blessing to His own, with love in His heart, and with words of

peace on His lips. So in that day of all that is awful and august they shall "lift up their heads with joy," and their hearts shall thrill with a rapture unspeakable, as their Redeemer, bringing redemption, draweth nigh. Then in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, "death shall be swallowed up of victory," and "mortality be swallowed up of life," the buried saints shall rise, the living saints shall be translated, and as they are "caught up to meet their Lord in the air," this shall be their triumphant song—"Lo! this is our God, we have waited for Him, and He will save us. This is the Lord, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation." And His words to them in answer to this welcome on their part shall be these—"Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." And then, oh! then, they shall go away with Him unto life eternal, "and so shall they ever be with the Lord."

CALVARY,
THE HILL OF SCORN.

XIII.

CALVARY.

“And when they were come to the place which is called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left.”—LUKE xxiii. 33.

CALVARY is not properly the name of a place. It is nothing more than the translation of what the evangelist calls “a skull.” It is the Latin word for the Hebrew “Golgotha.” In the scriptural narrative there is no mention of a mount or hill, and the popular expression “Mount Calvary” is completely destitute of any foundation. The precise locality of the place is not certainly known, and can only be conjectured. We only know that it was nigh to the city, and outside the walls of Jerusalem; for St Paul, writing to the Hebrew Christians, says that “Jesus suffered without the gate.”

It is the common opinion that Golgotha was a place between the then existing wall of Jerusalem and the descent into the valley of the Cedron, on

the east side of the city, near the road leading to Bethany. In this case the cross must have been in full view of any one standing on the Tower of Antonia, or in the temple courts, or on the Mount of Olives, or upon the eastern wall of the city, and the Crucifixion have been brought under the eyes of many thousands.

If this theory be correct, the traditional site now assigned to the Holy Sepulchre is the true one. Several reasons have been given why the place was called "Golgotha," "the place of a skull." There was a Jewish tradition that the body of Adam, or Adam's skull, was buried here. Others think that it was so called because the bones of the dead, who had been executed here as criminals, were strewed about the place where they had been put to death. Others again, and perhaps with greater probability, tell us that the name, "place of a skull," arose from the shape of the small rising rocky eminence, in form like a skull, on which the cross was planted. It is certain that limestone rock formed some of the natural scenery which lay round the site of the Crucifixion, such as the rock out of which the new tomb of Joseph of Arimathea was hewn, and the rocks which were

rent by the earthquake when Jesus bowed His head on the cross, and with a loud cry, gave up the ghost.

Though Calvary cannot be numbered among the mountains of the Bible, yet as the sweep of rocky hill on which it is probable the Crucifixion took place can still be traced, and as most certainly this is one of "the Hills which bring us peace," I trust there is some justification for bringing it under your notice on the present occasion.

The Cross must always hold the foremost place in our thoughts. Here man was reconciled unto God ; here all the varied attributes of divinity shine forth ; here all the types of the old covenant were completed, and all the prophecies clustering round the first Advent were fulfilled ; here was made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places the manifold wisdom of God ; here death was destroyed and the devil defeated ; here "mercy and truth met together, righteousness and peace kissed each other," the Saviour was honoured, and the sinner was saved.

We have a solemn subject before us this evening. Let us approach it with reverence and godly fear, for indeed we are on holy ground when we

speak and meditate on the redeeming sufferings of God "manifest in the flesh." "Almighty and everlasting God, who of Thy tender love towards mankind hath sent Thy Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ, to take upon Him our flesh, and to suffer death upon the cross, that all mankind should follow the example of His great humility, mercifully grant that we may both follow the example of His patience, and also be made partakers of His resurrection, through the same Jesus Christ our Lord."

Let us, in the first place, consider why it was that Jesus was "led out to the place called Calvary," or the place of a skull.

This was done that one of the great types of the Mosaic law might be accomplished. His enemies, when they led Him without the gates, were unconsciously fulfilling the shadows of the elder covenant. God was divinely overruling their malice and hate, and making human passions instrumental in giving striking evidence to the Messiahship of His Son.

The sin-offering on the great day of Atonement was to be carried forth without the camp, and burned. The bodies of the beasts that were offered in sacri-

fice were esteemed so thoroughly unclean, that the sacred ground of the Holy City might not be defiled by their blood. Nay, more, the man who burnt them was defiled by their touch, and was commanded "to wash his clothes, and bathe his flesh in water," before he could enter the camp again, and mingle with his brethren.

As our Lord came to be the true Sin-offering, to give His soul an offering for sin, it was necessary that the type should have an analogy in His death. This is insisted on in the Epistle to the Hebrews—"For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp. Wherefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered without the gate." He was willing to be reckoned as unclean. "For the joy that was set before Him, He endured the cross, despising the shame." Scribes and Pharisees, rulers and priests of the Jews, regarded Him as accursed. They despised and rejected Him, arraigned Him as an impostor and blasphemer, an enemy of God and a seducer of the people.

They arrested Him as if He were a thief,

coming out against Him with swords and staves, and heaping the grossest indignities on His head. They gave Him up to the mockery of Herod and his men of war, and to the cruel sport of the Roman soldiers. They condemned Him to be scourged, as though He were a slave of the worst and lowest character; they spat upon Him, buffeted Him, plucked the hairs from His cheeks, crowned Him with thorns, and then hurried Him off to a shameful and a cruel death—a death reserved for the most desperate criminals—crucifying Him between two thieves, as if He was the chief offender of them all. And as He was led forth to this painful and shameful death, they made the streets of Jerusalem ring again with the awful cry, “Away with Him! away with Him! Crucify Him! crucify Him!” “Not this man, but Barabbas!”

Of course in this fearful tragedy there was another hand than theirs; all was done in accordance with the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, and with the express consent of Him who came to give His life for the sheep, and who Himself said, “No man taketh my life from me. I lay down my life that I may take it

again ; I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up.”

Brethren, in that cross erected without the gates of Jerusalem you see the world’s judgment of the Saviour, and how it accounted Him unworthy to die in the Holy City ; and you have also another circumstance of external analogy between the shadows of the ancient economy and the history of Him in whom their meaning was perfectly fulfilled. For in Jesus “suffering without the gate,” interpreted by the light of the Mosaic ritual, we have a most striking proof of the vicarious nature of His death—“that He suffered, the just for the unjust, to bring us nigh unto God ;” “that He was made sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.”

And besides this great truth of the atoning death of Christ, witnessed to by the Crucifixion outside the walls of Jerusalem, and on which rest our hopes of pardon and acceptance and life eternal, there is also a very practical lesson, which all who would be Christ’s must learn. I give it to you in the apostle’s words—“Lèt us go forth, therefore, unto Him without the camp,

bearing His reproach." To be thrust forth from the camp of Israel was, as we have already seen, a mark and sign of uncleanness—"Let *us* not wait for this enforced excommunication," says the apostle; "but let us go willingly forth, and leaving the world which crucified our Lord, let us embrace scorn and contempt of our own accord, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater treasure than the riches of the world." He, in the greatness of His love to our souls, despised the shame and the anguish of the cross, and died that He might sanctify us with His own blood. Let us therefore despise the shame of "going forth without the camp," and of separating from a world which will scorn us as it scorned Him. For in taking up our cross we are entering into fellowship with Him who "loved us and gave Himself for us;" and if "reproach" be our portion, it is "the reproach of Christ" that we are bearing, and which we may therefore bind as a garland of glory round our brow. He that was "lifted up" on the cross, outside the gate of Jerusalem, and who poured forth His life that by the shedding of His precious blood we might be separated from this present evil world, calls us to come out, and

to follow Him in the path of duty, or of suffering, along which He leads. Let us obey the call, leaving behind everything, however dear or prized, which the world can offer to keep us back from His service—"taking pleasure in reproaches for Christ's sake," and "rejoicing that we are counted worthy to suffer shame for His name."

But having seen why Jesus was led without the city to Calvary, let us now pause upon the words, "There they crucified Him."

Crucifixion was one of the most painful, as well as one of the most lingering of deaths. All the attending circumstances were full of anguish. As the cross lay on the ground, the criminal, stripped of his clothes, was stretched upon it on his back; and when his hands were nailed to the two extremities of the transverse beam, and his feet nailed to the principal stem, then the cross, with its bleeding burden, was raised to an upright position, and dropped with a rude shock into a hole previously prepared for its reception. The cross was much shorter than is generally supposed, or than it is represented in pictures of the Crucifixion; and some say that there was a seat in the centre of the stem to bear the weight of the

body, which could not be supported only by the four nails, and that there was also a place for the feet to rest on. The sufferings of such a death must have been inexpressible. The violent tension of the body, the delicate nerves and sinews of the hands and feet torn and lacerated by the nails, the bleeding wounds exposed to the heat of day and the cold of night, the pressure upon the head, the strain upon the heart, the increasing weakness, and yet nothing to touch a vital part, and to bring relief through death, must have produced agony intolerable. And all this must have been heightened in our Saviour's case by the suffering of the hours that preceded the Crucifixion; the agony-in the garden, the sleepless night, the mental distress; the crowning with thorns, the savage scourging, the cruel mockery, the hasty and informal trial before the council, and all the storm of passion and hate in which He was swept from the Hall of Judgment along the way of sorrows to Calvary. Never was there such a sufferer as Jesus; for the higher the organisation, the larger the brain, the finer the nerve, the greater the power of suffering, and no one ever had the same capacity of pain as He,

or was so capable of anguish, since from His very constitution His bodily frame must have been of an exquisite delicacy and sensitiveness. And how must the sufferings of that awful hour, when He hung between earth and heaven, been aggravated by the chorus of defiant hate and scorn and devilish mockery which rose on every side around His cross? There was enough to call forth man's pity and commiseration, enough to break hard hearts, as they looked into that divine face, besmeared as it was with tears and blood; but pity or compassion there was none, nothing but hatred and blasphemy and contempt. All classes of men, princes and people, priests and rulers, Jews and Romans, Pharisees and Sadducees, joined in reviling Him; and the very thieves, fellow-sufferers with Him, cast the same in His teeth. And when you think of that death, when the Saviour was crucified on Calvary, and of all the elements of physical suffering with which it was thronged, you will acknowledge that it was exceptionally painful, and that "no sorrow was ever like unto His sorrow."

But, brethren, the physical suffering was light compared with the mental anguish which He

endured on the cross. His human soul was the scene of keener agony than that which affected the body, even the agony which arose from taking upon Himself the sins of the world. Who can enter into this sorrow? Who may say what it was for Him to bear the wrath of God? True, He had no direct experience of conscious sin. He had no personal sense of the divine anger. He knew nothing of a guilty conscience writhing under the wrath of God; but notwithstanding this, He felt in a very real sense what it was to have the world's iniquities pressing heavily upon Him—what it was to be “wounded for our transgressions and to be bruised for our iniquities, to bear the chastisement of our peace, that by His stripes we might be healed.” Hence the agony in the garden, with its great sweat of blood, and the mysterious words, “My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death,” and the thrilling prayer, “Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt.” Hence the awful and incomprehensible cry upon the cross, that rose through the darkness loud and clear, “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?” This

was the crown and climax of His sufferings, when "it pleased the Lord to bruise Him, and put Him to grief," and to make His soul an offering for sin, when He was "stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted."

That death was unlike the death of any of the sons of men—the wisest, the holiest, the best. No martyr ever died as Jesus died. Men have fallen in the cause of truth, of justice, or of right; but Jesus fell in the room of others, and in their stead, a sacrifice for their sins. His blood was their ransom; His substitution was their salvation. "He suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God." "He was once offered to bear the sins of many." By His death sinful men and the holy God are reconciled. "Christ," says St John, "is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." "Christ," says St Paul, "has delivered us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us;" and "we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace." Brethren, if there is any truth in God's Word, Christ's death was a sacrifice—it was a recon-

ciliation or atonement—it was a propitiation, a ransom or redemption, the paying down of a price. And hence the apostle could say with all the emphasis of truth to the elders whom He was addressing, as if for the last time, in words of strange pathos and power, “Take heed to yourselves to feed the Church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood.”

Do you ask how His death did thus redeem, propitiate, and reconcile the world to God? I can only answer, It is not given us to look into all the mysteries of that obedience unto death. We can see a little way, but that is all—only “through a glass darkly;” we “know but in part,” and the heights and the depths, and lengths and breadths of that atoning work pass our knowledge. We can understand “how Christ, the second Adam,” embodying in Himself, as its representative, the interests of His Church, acted on its behalf, and suffered and died in its room and in its stead.

We can comprehend how, thus representing His Church, He freely willed to die for it, “laying down His life for the sheep,” and freely in His love and in His pity bearing the burden which was ours. But to explain in what manner His

voluntary offering of Himself affected the divine government, and how His cross became a place where "mercy and truth met together, where righteousness and peace kissed each other," is beyond our power, nor dare we rashly speculate on the subject.

I should be sorry, by any attempt of mine to explain what God has left veiled in solemn mystery, and to lower your devout awe as you stand before the cross, and gaze upon the sacrifice of His Son. That sacrifice stands amidst the lapse of centuries and the waste of worlds a sublime and imperishable testimony to the holiness, the love, the justice, and the mercy of God. Enough for us to know that "God so loved the world as to give His only-begotten Son;" "that when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son." "God hath set forth Christ to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time, His righteousness, that He might be just, and the justifier of Him which believeth in Jesus." All that is needful to reconcile the

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world unto God has been done. "Sin has been made an end of, and an everlasting righteousness brought in, which is unto all and upon all them that believe." O blessed truth! O hope-inspiring faith! O friends and brethren, O men and women, who know the evil of sin and the anguish it brings, believing that your guilt was laid on that Sufferer, does there not flow to you from the cross a healing power which pacifies an accusing conscience and stills it into rest? You can testify that there is balm in Gilead, that there is a Physician there; you can bear witness that "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin." You know that "as many as touch Him are made perfectly whole." You can sing the song of heaven already upon earth—"Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father, to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever." Amen.

Brethren, the more we ponder upon Calvary, the more are we struck by the wonders it displays. All connected with it is pregnant with exhaustless meaning. The Actors in the awful tragedy of the Crucifixion represented all man-

kind : Jew and Gentile were there. It was not the deed of one race only, but of the world. Men of all ranks and classes had a part in that death—the mocking Herod, the time-serving Pilate, the malignant priests, the unbelieving scribes, the self-righteous Pharisees, the sceptical Sadducees, the fierce soldiers, the fickle multitude, the railing malefactors, the false and treacherous disciple. All human passions rose up to clamour for that murder—covetousness, cruelty, hypocrisy, envy, injustice, falsehood, and the fear of man. All sins ever committed in the long annals of human guilt were laid upon that Sufferer—the bitter wrongs, the cruel oppressions, the unutterable impurities, the hideous cries, the falsehoods, the blasphemies, the unbeliefs that have been desolating the world throughout the ages from the time of the Fall, or that shall burthen the earth to the end of time. The Cross itself, that implement of shame and pain and blood, if looked at in the light of divine prophecy, becomes a tree of life. “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” Mark again :

The inscription over the thorn-crowned Head, and written in the languages of the three great races,—the Hebrew, the Greek, the Latin,—bears witness to the world that the Sufferer is a King. The two crosses erected on either side of the Holy One, with a thief hanging upon each, the one penitent, the other hardened, were symbols of the treatment which the Crucified should receive to the end of time—some should receive Him, some should reject Him. Nor is this all.

The arms stretched out testified to His readiness to embrace a world. “I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.” The very words of His enemies have a deep meaning, a strange significance, proving that if “they know not what they do, they equally know not what they say.” Caiaphas declares, “It is expedient that one man should die for the people.” Pilate, bringing forth Jesus crowned with thorns, and clothed in purple, directs the attention of the people to Him with the words, “Behold the Man!” and the multitude who clamour for His death utter the memorable invocation, “His blood be on us, and on our children!” The seven last cries are full of blessed meaning, and pregnant with divine con-

solation. They tell of forgiveness to the very worst—"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." They prove an omnipotent power to save to the uttermost—to the thief hanging over the jaws of hell, a brand charred by the fire, He said, "Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise." They breathe a spirit of tenderest human love: to Mary He said, "Woman, behold thy son," and to John, "Behold thy mother." They demonstrate the reality of the atonement—"My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" They attest a yearning desire for the salvation of souls—"I thirst." They declare the perfection of that appalling death—"It is finished;" and they proclaim satisfaction in a work fully accomplished—"Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit." Shall we note "the blood and the water" which flowed from the pierced side when the Roman soldier drove the spear into His heart, emblems, the one of cleansing, the other of renewal? Shall we remark "the loud cry" with which Jesus gave up the ghost, proving that He did not die from exhaustion, that His life was "not taken from Him," that He "laid it down" of His own free and spon-

taneous act. He died more as a Victor than a victim, with the foe beneath His feet, the serpent's head under His heel, and in a way so unusual,—for they who were crucified generally took days to die,—that the Roman Centurion was struck with such astonishment and awe, that he exclaimed, “Truly this man was the Son of God!”

Or shall we mark how all nature was moved and agitated, as if throbbing at every pulse, by the death of her dying Lord? That loud cry rent the veil of the temple in twain, “to show that the way unto the Holiest of all was made manifest;” the earth quaked, to prove her sympathy with her dying Creator; and the solid rocks were rent asunder, that the graves might be opened, and the bodies of the saints be ready to arise on the morning of the third day, when Jesus left the tomb, as “the firstfruits of them that slept.”

Shall I speak of the triumphs of the cross? “When Thou shalt make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed.” The corn of wheat which has fallen to the ground and died has “brought forth much fruit.” Like Samson, Christ “has slain by His death more than they whom He slew in His life.” “Through death He

destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil, and made an end of sin, and robbed the grave of its victory, and opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers." Ever since His ascension to His throne, God has been "adding to the Church daily such as shall be saved." Wherever the cross is preached, it is inspiring faith and hope and love. Wherever Christ crucified is proclaimed, sinners are flocking to His feet, to trust, to worship, and to adore. Not a year, not a month, not a week, not a day passes, without some addition to the great "cloud of witnesses," the great, countless multitude of the redeemed, who are chanting ever round the Throne, in the midst of which stands "a Lamb as it had been slain,"—"Thou art worthy; for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us unto God by Thy blood, out of every nation and tongue, and people and kindred." And this is but a pledge of what shall be: this is but a promise of the time when "every knee shall bow at the name of Jesus," and "every tongue shall confess that He is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." "Then shall the kings of the earth bring to Him their honour and glory, and the nations of them that are saved

shall walk in His light." A kingdom shall be given Him, and the crowns of the earth shall be laid at His feet. Not a murmur of dissatisfaction shall be heard from pole to pole as He "takes the government of the world upon His shoulders," and the glad tidings is wafted on every wind to every land, that "the kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and His Christ." "Then all men shall be blessed in Him, and all nations shall call Him blessed." Yes, all nations; for no tongue shall be silent in the great multitude, when with a loud voice, mighty as the rush of the waves against the shore, or as the sound of the thunder-crash in the sky, they sing the new song, and cry, "Alleluia! alleluia! for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth!"

My brethren, how utterly insignificant is every other question that we can ask ourselves compared with this—"Shall my voice join in that triumphant song?" Shall the Redeemer see in me of "the fruit of the travail of His soul"? There is but one hope for any man—to grasp in faith the cross of Him who died there for sin. If we reject this, "there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins." Alas for you! alas for any man!

if through a rejection of His love you have no part in that lifegiving tree where the Saviour hung, where the curse was borne, and the shame despised, and the guilt atoned! What guilt can equal that of "crucifying Christ afresh" by our impenitence and unbelief? What penalty is too great for such a sin? Is hell, with its quenchless fire and undying worm, beyond the deserts of the soul which turns with contempt from Him who bowed the heavens to the cross for us men, and for our salvation? "But we are persuaded better things of you, brethren, and things that accompany salvation." You will claim a share in the merits of Him who hung upon the cross with pierced hands and feet, and wounded side, and painful crown of thorns; you will seek cleansing in the blood of your dying, agonised Lord, and so Calvary will be one of "the Hills,"—yea, the chiefest of all "the Hills that bring you peace." At the foot of the cross you will learn the great lesson that "you are not your own, but bought with a price, and you will glorify God in your body and spirit, which are God's." And so the cross will have a sanctifying power. Here you will learn to crucify the flesh, with its affections and

lusts. Here you will see the evil of sin, and learn to hate it. Starting from the cross you will run the heavenly race ; and forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forth unto those things that are before, you will "press toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." The cross will so fill your mind, your imagination, and your heart, that you will say with St Paul, "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." So, with the cross as your trust, and heaven as your hope, and Christ as "all your salvation and all your desire," you will fight and "overcome by the blood of the Lamb ;" and your path an upward one, and "shining more and more unto the perfect day," you will at length reach that bright world where all the ransomed of the Lord cast their crowns at the feet of Jesus, with the cry, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. Amen and Amen."

ZION,
THE MOUNTAIN OF PRIVILEGE.

XIV.

Z I O N.

“But ye are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.”—HEB. xii. 22-24.

JERUSALEM was built on three hills. On the highest stood the fortress of David, or Zion, and this contained the upper market-place. On the second, called Akra, the lower city was situated; and on the third, still lower than Akra, and right opposite to it—the Moriah of the Old Testament—rose the temple in its surpassing grandeur and beauty. On Zion stood the great fort of the Jebusites which David took; and in after-ages a splendid city of palaces sprang up round this fort, where dwelt the kings and nobles of Judea. Zion is sometimes called “the city of David,” for he

had his residence in this the great stronghold of Jerusalem. Though from the importance of this fortress the entire city was sometimes designated Zion, yet are the two often spoken of as distinct. For example, in these passages—"In Salem is His tabernacle, and His dwelling-place in Zion"—"Out of Jerusalem shall go forth a remnant, and they that escape out of Mount Zion." Zion is often mentioned in terms of praise in the Psalms—"Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is Mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King. God is known in her palaces for a refuge"—"Walk about Zion, and go round about her; tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces; that ye may tell it to the generation following"—"Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined."

There is now nothing remaining of the Zion once so famed; nothing is left of the magnificence of Jerusalem as it was in the ancient days—the times of old. The hill is there, but the palaces and the towers and bulwarks are gone. The prophecy has been fulfilled—"Zion shall be ploughed like a field, and Jerusalem shall become

heaps." The foundations of the city were turned up by the Roman ploughshare, and the holy sanctuary burned with fire. Its site is profaned by a Moslem mosque; and "Ichabod, the glory is departed," is written on her "who was the perfection of beauty;" and where once the psalm was sung to Jehovah is now chanted the muezzin of Islam. Zion, from its associations and its privileges, is very commonly used as a name for the Church of Christ; the Church which God has founded on the Rock of Ages, in which He dwells, and against which "the gates of hell shall not prevail." Of this Church we can say, "We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks;" and of this Church we can declare, "There is a river the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early." It is of Zion in its spiritual character, as the Church of Christ, that I am about to speak to you; and may we find, through the word coming to you with demonstration of the Spirit and with power, that this is one of "the Hills that bring peace!"

Zion, the Mountain of Privilege, is our subject on the present occasion: Zion, the Mountain of Glory, shall form the next and closing lesson of "the Hills that bring us peace."

In the eloquent and impassioned words of the text we have a full and remarkable expression of the privileges of Christians under the gospel covenant. The apostle, in warning the Hebrews against apostacy from the faith of Christ, throws their thoughts back on the awful grandeur of the revelation of God to their fathers in the wilderness. No sooner had the Israelites left the shores of the Red Sea, than they found themselves in a desert, mountain region, shut in on every side by mighty walls of rock, rugged and stern, desolate and bare. The awful silence of the wilderness rested on the camp; and in a dreadful solitude, far away from the populous cities of the Nile and the luxuriant pastures of Goshen, where they had fed their flocks and herds, they were to meet with God. They were told that on the morning of the third day the Lord would come down in the sight of all the people upon Mount Sinai, and they were to make ready for the vision of His glory. A new element of terror was added by the command that

the base of the mountain was to be fenced round against all approach, and that "if so much as a beast touch it, it shall be stoned." This they "could not endure;" it made them feel in what mysterious and awful nearness they stood to the invisible presence of God.

The morning of the third day came; and we can imagine the silent and wondering dread which filled every heart while the people waited for the promised manifestation of Jehovah. At last they saw dense black clouds gathering on the mountain; then came flashing lightnings; presently the earth shook under the crash of thunder; then came the sound of a trumpet, long and loud, pealing through the camp, and reverberated from the surrounding hills, the signal that the revelation was about to be made, and "the Lord descended in flame," and it seemed that Sinai itself was on fire. And "the smoke went up like the smoke of a furnace, and the mountain trembled greatly;" and "out of the midst of the fire, of the cloud, and of the thick darkness, came a great voice." God began to speak to the people, and to declare His law; but when ten commandments had been given, they could bear no more—they removed, and stood afar

off. And the heads of the tribes, and the elders, came to Moses, and said, "We have seen this day that God doth talk with man, and he liveth. Now, therefore, why should we die? For this great fire will consume us; if we hear the voice of the Lord any more, then shall we die." And they "entreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more." Thus did St Paul recall the grandeur of that sublime scene when, amid thunderings and lightnings and voices, the law was given, dwelling upon the awful terrors of Sinai, that he might impress those whom he addresses with their higher and better privileges under the gospel. He knew that by their reception of Christ the Hebrews had been delivered from "the spirit of bondage again to fear," and had been given "the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." They had been "enlightened," and "were made partakers of the Holy Ghost," and felt the grace and the power of the new and spiritual kingdom, "the kingdom which is not meat and drink, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." Sixteen centuries before, Moses had brought forth their fathers out of the camp to meet with God before

Mount Sinai; “but ye are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.”

Let us examine the privileges of the Christian as set forth in these verses—“Ye are come unto Mount Zion.” God revealed Himself to the Israelites on the wild and rugged heights of Sinai, and gave them a law which was, and which could only be, “a ministration of death.” The law, in man’s fallen state, cannot be the instrument of his salvation. This was most impressively declared by those terrible manifestations which took place upon the mount. Why the thunder and the lightning? Why the thick cloud and the furnace smoke, and the descent of the Lord in fire? Why the terror of the people, and the command not to come near lest the mountain should be touched? Why all this array of majesty and fear? Because God would in this solemn manner declare that the

law is a ministration of condemnation; "that by the deeds of the law no flesh can be justified in His sight." Why, then, was the law given at all? It was added because of transgression, till "the seed should come to whom the promise was made." It was to shut men up unto the "faith which should afterwards be revealed." It was a schoolmaster, to bring them unto Christ that they might be justified by faith. But now that faith is come, we are no "longer under a schoolmaster." "We are come unto Mount Zion." Heaven is ours now, through faith in a risen and ascended Saviour, who "died for our sins." Brethren, if anywhere in the whole Bible there is a statement of the present salvation that belongs to the believer, it is here. Let us not fail to grasp the blessed truth that salvation is as really a present as a future blessing. The difference is purely one of development—the difference between the bud and the flower, the dawn and the day. All that makes heaven is the Christian's now—love, peace, joy, holiness, God with us, Christ in us, the Spirit's presence in the soul. "He that believeth on the Son of God hath everlasting life." Heaven is no idle dream of happiness, but a present

reality; for the Christian's heaven is union and communion with his Lord. "Ye are come," already "come," to the towers and pinnacles of the glorious city of the Most High—

"To the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem." Ye are not come, as the Israelites of old, to the dreary solitudes of the desert, but to that upper city in which the nations of the saved walk in white raiment, and dwell in palaces of blessedness and splendour. "Our conversation," our citizenship, "is in heaven." We are now citizens of a city not formed and fashioned by human hands, or composed of stones hewn from the quarries of this earth; but a city which has a great and glorious Architect, "whose Builder and Maker is God," whose streets are gold, whose walls are jasper, and whose gates are pearl—citizens, indeed, of no mean city. And if this be true of us, what a power should it exercise over our hearts and lives! How it should consecrate our earthly work! How it should hallow our life, making the whole round of duty radiant and holy with the light shed on it from heaven! and oh! how loosely should it make us sit to the things of earth—its shows and pomps, its vanities and

pleasures, seeing "we have in heaven a better and more enduring substance;" "a house not made with hands, eternal there;" "an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away." Oh to live as those who "are come to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem!"

"And to an innumerable company of angels." "The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels." At Sinai the angels appeared in lambent flame, and added to the terror of the scene; but at Zion, to which we have come, they gather round us with welcomes of love, and with songs of joy, and golden harps, and their faces bright with tenderness and grace. "Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister to them who shall be heirs of salvation?" These bright and blessed spirits take us, who are heirs of salvation, into their charge, and they "keep us in all our ways," and with tender and thoughtful care, ward off danger and harm. They carry on their mystical "encampings round about us," "the bearing of us up in their hands, lest we dash our foot against a stone." And these "watchings" and

“wardings” and “keepings” are not ended until we are beyond the reach of every foe, and are lifted by grace into their eternal company. For they not only attend us through life, but are near us at death, waiting until last “farewells” are over; and then taking us into their arms, they plume their shining wings, and fly home to heaven with their sacred charge, rejoicing as those who have found great spoil. And when at home there, we shall see them face to face, and join our voices with theirs in singing the praises of God through their song and our song—“Salvation unto Him that sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb.” In the meantime—O happy thought!—we, though we walk “by faith and not by sight,” nor hold conscious communion with these lofty intelligences, yet belong to their fellowship, and “are now come to an innumerable company of angels.”

“And to the general assembly and church of the first-born which are written in heaven.”

“The church of the first-born” is a title and description of the character and standing of all true believers. It does not refer, as some suppose, to the first-fruits of the Christian Church, those

already gathered into rest, those who had entered earlier than others into the glories of heaven. These are alluded to in the words, "The spirits of just men made perfect." Nor are the "first-born" the patriarchs and saints of the Old Testament. The phrase describes all true Christians; because they are heirs of the heavenly inheritance. The words might be translated, "the church of the heirs." Thus Christ is styled "the Firstborn," "the Heir." To Him the Father has given the worlds, with all their riches and glory and splendour; the universe, with things visible and invisible, is laid down at His feet; and all who are born of His Spirit, who are washed, justified, and sanctified in His name, heirs as they are of His Father, and joint-heirs with Himself, compose the church of the first-born. And note the expression, "written in heaven." By this the apostle would teach us that the Church of Christ—"the Bride, the Lamb's Wife"—His mystical Body—is really one, though its members are not all in existence yet. We may look on the Church as consisting of four classes. The first class consists of those who have fallen asleep in Jesus, whose bodies have returned to dust, and whose

spirits, being delivered from the burden of the flesh, are “present with the Lord” in joy and felicity. The second class consists of those on the earth in all climes and nations, who are quickened into spiritual life by divine grace, in whom the Holy Spirit dwells and acts, who trust in Jesus, and walk with God, not by sight, but by faith. The third class consists of those on the earth, in all climes and nations, who in the purpose of God are to be converted to the truth, but who are not yet effectually quickened into spiritual life. The fourth class consists of those who are not yet born into this world, but who are foreseen of God in the loins of their parents, or their parents’ parents, and who, in the divine will, are to be born, and in due time to be “born again.” And these four classes are included in the expression “written in heaven.” It is a designation which comprehends the whole company of the faithful from the beginning to the end of time,—all from Abel, the first martyr, to the last of the elect who shall be gathered into the fold, and added to the flock of that Good Shepherd who “laid down His life for the sheep.” “Rejoice,”—said the Saviour of sinners,—“Rejoice not that spirits and devils

are made subject unto you ; but rejoice in this, that your names are written in heaven."

Brethren, are you *come* to this "general assembly and church of the first-born, whose names are written in heaven?" How shall you know? There need be no doubt or difficulty in the matter. Have you God's name written in your heart "by His Spirit"? is His image traced there? has His love been shed abroad there by the Holy Ghost? Then is "*your* name written in heaven." I have not the least fear about my name being found in "the Lamb's Book of Life," if I can find God's name written in my heart—if the Spirit witnesseth with my spirit that I am a child of God. If you have chosen God, you have proof positive that God has first chosen you—that He has loved you with an everlasting love, and with loving-kindness has drawn you to Himself. Have you responded to the call—"Son, give me thine heart"? Christ in the heart, and the heart given to Christ—is this your standing to-day? Then we may tell you for your infinite comfort, that you "are come to the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven."

“And to God the Judge of all.” Does not this savour of terror rather than of peace, of bondage rather than of pardon, of Sinai rather than of Zion? Not so; God “the Judge of all” has no terror for the man who is acquitted in Christ—“There is now no condemnation for them who are in Christ Jesus.” God is a just God, and a Saviour; justice as well as mercy enters into the salvation offered by the gospel. Redemption through the obedience and death of Christ magnifies all the divine attributes, as well as meets all human necessities; and in our deliverance from the wrath to come God’s holiness is as conspicuous as His love. “If we confess our sins, He is FAITHFUL and JUST to forgive us our sins.” This is the glory of the gospel, that it ranges on the side of the believer the perfections of the divine character, and shows us how, in the acquittal of the sinner who takes refuge in Christ, “mercy and truth have met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other.” It is the highest prerogative of justice to reward the faithful, to crown the brows of virtue or of valour, and send suspected innocence back to the world amid the plaudits of an honourable acquittal. Christ’s noblest function

is, not to condemn the guilty, but to bestow crowns on the deserving. You will remember the triumphant words of St Paul, when, having fought the fight and finished his course, he looks forward to the awards of the great white throne—"Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous Judge"—not the Lord the merciful God—"the Lord the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day." And of the same nature is his challenge, as, rising into assurance from the contemplation of the eternal purpose of God, he exclaims, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth." Therefore does the apostle rank it as one amongst our many privileges that we are "come to God the Judge of all," who shall reward a Saviour in the saved.

"And the spirits of just men made perfect"—"the fellowship of the spirits of the just." "I believe in the communion of saints"—"just men," justified men. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God." "The just shall live by faith." But in this world, though there is pardon and acceptance for the believer, there is no perfection. "The just man falleth seven times a day." "There is no man

that liveth and sinneth not." The best of men are but men at the best. The holiest saints are but sinners. The greatest characters are compassed about with infirmity. The meekest of men "spake unadvisedly with his lips." "The father of the faithful" failed in faith; the noblest spirit of his time gave way to despondency, and throwing himself under a juniper-tree, prayed that he might die. The most fervent and boldest of the apostles dissembled through the fear of man. There was but one perfect man on earth; pure, faultless, "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." Perfection is reserved for the future world. When the soul is emancipated from this body of sin and death, and casts aside "the muddy vesture of decay," it shall be presented "perfect in Christ Jesus" before the throne, without spot, or wrinkle, or blemish, or any such thing. "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord; yea, saith the Spirit, for they rest from their labours, and their works do follow them." "They rest from their labours"—they rest from the conflict with besetting sin and indwelling corruption; they "rest" from the struggle between "the mind that delights in the law of God" and "the

flesh that still feels the working of the law of sin in its members." The warfare is over, the battle ceases, the soldier puts off his armour and puts on "the fine linen," clean and white, and God gives him the palm for the sword, gives him "beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." Oh, happy they who, "being absent from the body, are present with the Lord;" who, having "made it Christ to live, find it gain to die." And happy they who, being knit together with all the elect in one mystical body—who, being "bound up with them in the same bundle of life with the Lord," can challenge angel, or man, or devil, "things present or things to come, height or depth, and every other creature, to separate them from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." "Though the outward man perish," yet under the power of the Spirit "the inward man is renewed day by day." Every year grows brighter and brighter with the nearer light of heaven. Care may furrow the brow, age may dim the power of the eye, death may dissolve the earthly house of this tabernacle—but what then? Union with Christ is stronger than death, and mightier

than the grave; and the man who enters "the dark valley" with Christ in him "the hope of glory," shall emerge from its shadows to find himself in the beauty of the eternal morning, "with the spirits of just men made perfect."

"And to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant." Not to Moses and the Old Testament, but to Jesus and the New. And a blessed thing it is to be allowed to come to Christ himself—to "come boldly," no one intervening. It is the great sin of Rome that between the sinner and the Saviour she has placed a strong barrier of false doctrines and vain traditions and superstitious ceremonies. She blocks up the way of access to Him by a crowd of saintly and angelic mediators who intercept Him from the view; she fastens the eye on Peter as more accessible, or on John as more sympathising, and drawing the Virgin Mary from the subordinate position given to her in Scripture, exalts her, "the humble and meek," to the throne of her divine Son, and clothes her with all His immaculate purity and power, with all His mediatorial offices, and with even more than all His compassion and grace. She bids us to look to Mary, to pray to Mary, to trust to Mary rather

than to Christ. And so she is guilty of the blood of souls ; because through all this crowd of interposing mediators sinners cannot get near to Jesus. We will not, we dare not do this ! No ; God forbid ! The Church to which we belong, and which was reformed at the cost of the blood of the bravest and best, does it not ; she has made clear the manner of approach to Jesus. She neither stands in the way herself, nor suffers others to do so. Her formularies all point to Christ ; she gives you services, but she tells you they are not Christ, but means of bringing you to Christ. Her ministers are commanded to preach, not themselves, but Christ ; not the Church, but Christ ; not the sacraments, but Christ. ~ Yes, she gives the honour that is due to Peter and John as holy men, and “ with all generations she calls Mary blessed ; ” but she adores Christ, and worships Him only, and clearing away every object that would interpose between our souls and Him, and “ breaking down every middle wall of partition,” she invites you to “ come to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant,” and make Him “ all your salvation and all your desire.”

“ The blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better

things than the blood of Abel." "The blood of Christ" is called "the blood of sprinkling," in allusion to the various "sprinklings of blood" under the Old Testament. The blood of the Paschal Lamb was "sprinkled" on the door-posts, and on the lintels of the houses of the Israelites, on the night when the first-born of Egypt were destroyed. The tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry, were sprinkled with blood; the high priest, on the great day of atonement, carried into the most holy place the blood of the sacrifice, and "sprinkled" it on the Mercy-seat and before it: and so the blood of Christ—the blood of the new covenant—is called "the blood of sprinkling," because when applied by faith to the heart, it "cleanses from all sin," purging the conscience from dead works to serve the living God. "It speaketh better things than the blood of Abel." Abel's blood cried aloud for justice on his murderer; Christ's blood cried aloud for the forgiveness of His. Abel's blood appealed for vengeance; Christ's blood pleaded for pardon. It pleads on behalf of the guilty still: it pleaded for the Jews, who like Cain had shed an elder Brother's blood; it pleads for you, who may have

“crucified Christ afresh, and put Him to an open shame.” The voice with which that blood spake from the cross is the same with which to-day it speaks from the throne; and it is laden with mercy. “Father”—it says—“Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” Oh, how His grace abounds over “abounding sin!” Who is there, then, that may not rejoice in the fulness of pardoning love? Hear the words of St Paul to the Church at Rome—“God hath set forth Christ to be a propitiation, through faith in His blood, for the remission of sins.” To the Ephesians he says—“We have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sin, according to the riches of His grace.” To the Colossians—“By whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins.” St Peter writes thus for our comfort—“Knowing that ye were redeemed, not with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.” St John gives everlasting glory and dominion to “Him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood.” And in heaven the multitude which no man can number sing a new song to

golden harps as they celebrate the praises of the Lamb—"Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood out of every kindred and tongue, and people and nation." Then, my brethren, rejoice in the cleansing, purifying, peace-speaking power of the blood. Fight in the strength of this, and you shall overcome. Grasp your privileges, live the heavenly life on earth, walk with God, be "filled with all joy and peace in believing, and abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost." Away with all dishonouring and tormenting fears; let Mount Zion be one of "the Hills that bring you peace!" "For ye are not under the law, but under grace;" ye are not servants, but children; yours is the spirit of adoption, and yours the privilege of believing that the great heart of God is filled with joy as He sees you treading that upward path which "shineth more and more unto the perfect day. Still doth the old cry ring out over every saved one—"Sing, O daughter of Zion; be glad and rejoice, O daughter of Jerusalem!" The Lord hath taken away thy judgment, He hath cast out thine enemy; fear not, and let not thine hands be slack. "The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is

mighty: He will save." Salvation is not only a blessing to us, but a joy unspeakable to Him. The parent who with beating heart and bounding pulse sees his child rescued from the wave or delivered from the fire, and with an unmeasured gladness folds him in his arms, and lavishes tears and kisses on his cheek, presents but a dim and imperfect image of "our Father which is in heaven." His gladness is such as becomes His great and infinite heart of tenderness and grace. "He will rest in His love: He will joy over thee with joy; He will rejoice over thee with singing." "As a bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee."

ZION,
THE MOUNTAIN OF GLORY.

XV.

ZION.

“And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the Mount Zion, and with Him an hundred forty and four thousand, having His Father’s name written in their foreheads.”—REV. xiv. 1.

MOUNT ZION in its glory is our present theme. On former occasions we have ascended together some of the mountains of earth, and have spoken of their position in Palæstine, and of the scenery which crowns their peaks or which may be seen from their summits. We ascended these sacred heights not without a purpose; for we climbed their slopes that we might gather from them the truths which they teach, and the lessons of which they are so full. From Ararat, where the ark rested, we passed on from mountain to mountain until we reached Zion, “of which glorious things are spoken,” and “whose gates the Lord loveth more than all the dwellings of Jacob.”

We saw how “beautiful for situation was Mount

Zion"—“The joy of the whole earth on the sides of the north, the city of the great King.” We “marked her towers and her bulwarks, and considered her palaces,” and looked at her in her symbolical character as the elect Church of the living God. We meditated on the many present and great privileges of this Church. “For,” says the apostle to the Hebrew Christian, “ye are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, and to the general assembly and Church of the first-born which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaketh better things than that of Abel.” And now we come to Mount Zion in its glory, to the Capital of the heavenly kingdom, that city which is to be the everlasting abode of the Saviour and His redeemed. For we read in the prophecies of Isaiah that “the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and mourning shall flee away.”

We have therefore a glorious subject before us, but embarrassing from its very nature. How is it to be treated? Where are we to begin? How are we to end? There are no aids of geography here. Where is heaven? Is it in some glorious world beyond those shining stars that sparkle on the brow of night? Is the heaven of heavens—seat of the eternal throne—some central kingdom in the vast universe of God? In what part of infinite space does “the King of kings” hold His court, and in unveiled majesty preside over the powers and principalities that delight to do His bidding? Where is the land where angels wait and seraphim adore? What is its scenery? What the nature of its landscapes? Who may say? No descriptions of travellers who have been there, and have returned to earth to tell us of its glories, help us. As it is written, “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.” There was once “a man in Christ who was caught up to the third heaven, whether in the body he could not tell, or whether out of the body he could not tell;” but when he came back to the world the seal of silence was

on his lips; and though he had seen visions of brightness, and had "heard unspeakable words," it was "not lawful," or possible, "for him to utter" what he had been privileged to see and hear. It is true that in the visions of St John we have a description of heaven, of its golden streets and jasper walls, and "foundations inlaid with all manner of precious stones." We read of the tree of life, the crystal river, the white-robed multitude, and the glittering city. But after all, these are but images and types, figures and symbols of heaven. The descriptions are adapted to human comprehension; but heaven, as it is actually, is so entirely beyond the grasp of our faculties, that no delineation is attempted, no representation is given. Moreover, it is usual to say that we know more of heaven from what it is not than from what it is. It is painted in negative. "There is no night there." "There shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away." "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat." "There shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomi-

nation, or maketh a lie, but they which are written in the Lamb's Book of Life." But whilst this is the case, and though St Paul's silence, his "unspeakable words, which it is not lawful or possible for a man to utter," more impressively set before us the inconceivable glories of heaven than St John's visions of splendour, and his glowing pictures of a land whence all sorrow is excluded, yet enough is told to strengthen both our faith and hope, and to reveal the nature of the world where "God is all in all."

I shall bring before you some of the elements in the blessedness of the New Jerusalem, the celestial City, where they "serve God day and night in His temple," where "the Lord God giveth them light, and they reign for ever and ever." And as we meditate on the shining inheritance reserved for the righteous, on its transcendent glory and unspeakable blessedness—as we muse on Mount Zion, where the redeemed stand in presence of the Lamb, harping with their harps and singing the new song, may we indeed find that this is one of the "Hills that bring peace!"

The first element in heaven's blessedness that

I would mention is this—"The presence of the Lamb."

"I looked, and lo, a Lamb stood on Mount Zion."

Brethren, no matter what the place, or what its glories, heaven would be no heaven to the Christian without Christ. If the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, and who purchased us with His blood, were not there—if He who died, and rose, and ascended, that He might prepare for His people a place in the many mansions of His Father's house, were absent, heaven would be shorn of all its glory. If, when the Christian reached the New Jerusalem, Christ were not to be seen, he would have no eye for the splendour of the place, no ear for its harmonies; he would pace up and down its golden streets weeping and wringing his hands, and uttering the despairing cry of Mary when she found the sepulchre empty—"They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him." The source of heaven's blessedness will be the presence of Christ, the power of following Him through the wide expanse of the future "whithersoever He goes," and ever through the immediate

and direct manifestation of His glory there vouchsafed to be in contact with Him, and to see Him, and God in Him, and to feel that He is our Guide into that fuller knowledge which shall be ours when we stand in the clear sunlight of His face, who is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life." Our eternal life *here* consists in the knowledge of the one true God, and Jesus Christ whom He has sent; and *there* "the Lamb in the midst of the throne shall feed us," for He shall still be the centre of all life and knowledge, and "shall lead us to living fountains of waters, and God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes." In this will consist the very heart of our joy, to be as sensible of the presence of Christ as we now are of the presence of a friend when he is standing by us, and we are looking into his face and feeling the touch of his hand, and his voice is sounding in our ear. The devout heart has ever longed for this. The one thing desired by the holy men of old was to be admitted into the temple of God, and to behold His beauty: their sorrow was when God's face was hidden: their prayer was that He would "make His face to shine on them:" their hope was to "see His face

in righteousness," and when they awoke from the grave to be "satisfied with His likeness." "I pray Thee, show me Thy glory," was the cry of Moses when he talked with the Lord at the door of the tabernacle, and his heart craved for a visible manifestation of the Invisible. "Show us the Father, and it sufficeth us," was the prayer of Philip to Jesus. "Thine eyes shall see the King in His beauty," was a promise of the old covenant, which gathered into itself the highest ideal of happiness. And the promise of the new covenant is this which dropped from the lips of Christ himself—"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." To see God, in the fullest meaning, must mean nothing less than this: to see His grace and His glory mirrored in the face of that Being who is the living, eternal, and express image of Him who "dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen or can see." The blessedness of that perfect vision who may tell? the vision of God in the face of Jesus Christ, when sight takes the place of faith; and the method of the revelation is direct and complete, and we gaze, and gaze for ever, into that countenance of blended majesty and

mercy, in which we see reflected the greatness and the glory of “the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God?” St Paul, leading us up to the climax of heaven’s joy, sets forth its rapture in these words—“Now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face: now we know in part, but then shall we know even as also we are known.” St John, passing from the present privileges of the believer to his future blessedness, thus puts the crown on heaven’s felicity—“Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know when He shall appear we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.” The vision perfect, and the vision transforming; what can we desire more than this? What can we imagine that would be more blessed than this? Oh! what will be the joy of the heart when the presence of Christ shall, in a literal sense, be our strength and our portion for ever? when He shall be seen to be our felt and ever-living life? when we shall receive the hidden manna from His own hand, and drink at the fountain-head of His ever-flowing pleasures, and be taught by His own divine lips all that it concerns us to know? when

“He satisfies the longing soul, and fills the hungry soul with goodness?” “Blessed are they who are called to the marriage-supper of the Lamb!” All heaven, all that is blessed, all that is transcendent in happiness, or rapturous in joy, or lofty in conception, is held forth to the heart and to the mind in the prayer of Christ to His Father when, interceding on behalf of His own, He said, “Father, I will that they whom Thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory which Thou hast given me.” And this prayer shall receive its fulfilment when the redeemed of the Lord, who have the Father’s name in their foreheads, and the harps of God in their hands, shall “stand on Mount Zion with the Lamb.”

A second element in the glory of heaven will be the presence of all the saints, the whole family named after the name of Christ, the elect of God, and the redeemed of the Cross.

Heaven is a home into which all the children of God shall be gathered. There all who have been born of the same Spirit, and have been fed by “the sincere milk” of the same Word, and who have been trained in the same school of divine discipline,

shall meet and mingle, and have blessed communion for evermore. From far-parted lands shall they come, from many climes, from various dispensations, from different ranks and grades and classes, and, no longer “a little flock,” they shall form “a great cloud of witnesses,” “a great multitude which no man can number,” countless as the dew born from the womb of the morning, or as the stars which sparkle in the midnight skies. And what will it be to have communion with the holy and the good of all ages—to converse with patriarchs who trod the earth whilst it was yet young—with prophets, who gazed with divinely-opened eyes into the future—with seers, who were favoured with visions from God—with apostles, who walked with Christ in the days of His humiliation on earth—with martyrs, who went to the rack and to the stake for the cause of truth—with saints, who were as lights shining in a dark place, and walked the world with God? If it be one of our greatest pleasures on earth to hold converse with the great and the good—if we delight in coming into contact with men of noble and lofty minds—if it be a privilege to listen to “thoughts that breathe, and words that burn,”

from the lips of men of genius and talent, from the philosopher, the poet, the historian, the traveller—what will be the joy of talking face to face with all that is best and holiest and saintliest amongst the children of men? What men there are whose names live on the pages of the Bible, with whom converse would be a delight—names which, without mention on my part, will rise to your memory! What men, too, in Church history, who wrought moral and bloodless revolutions, and left the world better than they found it; God's heroes, who "fought the good fight of faith," and wrestled against sin and corruption and error, and "counted not their lives dear unto themselves" for the truth's sake, and who have long since grasped the palm and been rewarded with the crown! Ay, and there, gathered round Christ on Mount Zion, will be many of those whom we ourselves have known and loved: for in heaven there will be a renewal of natural affections and human ties, and we shall be given back the lost and the dear. We shall feel again "the touch of the vanished hand," and hear again "the sound of the voice that was still." Death-severed souls shall meet once more: human rela-

tionships shall be renewed. The husband and the wife, one in a common faith—the parent and the child, partakers of a common hope—the brother and the sister, “bound up in the same bundle of life with the Lord”—the pastor and the people who have been his “joy and crown of rejoicing in the Lord”—will all be reunited within the gates of that heavenly city from which we “shall go no more out;” and they shall enjoy eternal communion, and clasp hands in everlasting fellowship; and, dwelling in one home, under one roof, in one Father’s presence, they shall have every one occupations and pursuits and pleasures suited to their several tastes, while each is linked to each in the sacred harmony of endless and eternal love. They shall stand within the radiance of the same unclouded light, and drink at the same ever-welling fountain of life; and with one great heart of throbbing joy, and one harmonious voice of thrilling song, will unite in praising Him through whose blood they have overcome, and through whose merits they are robed in “the fine linen, clean and white, which is the righteousness of saints.”

Another element of heaven will be Praise.

“I heard a voice from heaven as the voice of

many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder ; and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps, and they sung, as it were, a new song before the throne, and before the four living things, and the elders, and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand which were redeemed from the earth."

Again and again is praise represented to be one of the joys of heaven. The four living things, "full of eyes within," and each having six wings, rest not day or night, saying, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come." The four-and-twenty elders fall down before Him that sits on the throne, and casting their crowns before it, cry, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and praise, for Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created." "The great multitude which no man can number," and which is "redeemed out of all nations," which is clothed in white, and bearing palms in their hands, cry with a loud voice, "Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb!" And the angels that encircle the throne say, "Amen; Blessing and glory, and wisdom and thanksgiving,

and honour and power and might, be unto our God for ever and ever, Amen." Those who gain the victory over the beast and over his image, and who "stand on the sea of glass mingled with fire," having the harps of God, sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, "Great and marvellous are Thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of saints." And when Babylon, that mighty city, the enemy of God and of His Church, and the persecutor of His saints, is judged and thrown down, the voice of a great multitude rises to Him that sits on the throne, "Alleluia, salvation and glory, and honour and power be unto the Lord our God!" "Alleluia, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth!"

We cannot wonder that in heaven praise should be a main element of its happiness; for here upon earth there is a vivid and intense pleasure in rapturous devotion, in pouring out the grateful emotions of the heart in thanksgiving. There is a true blessedness in a spirit of praise when, under the constraint of a full-hearted joy, words of gratitude rise from the soul to the lip, and the spirit soars aloft to its God in grateful song.

“A good and joyful thing it is to be thankful.” The more our worship on earth is a worship of praise, the more is the spirit lifted above the cares and sorrows of time, and raised heavenward on the wings of a strong and unutterable gladness; and therefore we can understand how when we reach the lofty perfection of the redeemed life, adoration shall be one of its highest employments and enjoyments; and what unspeakable delight it will be to tell out to God the emotions awakened in our hearts by His grace and His goodness, to magnify Him for His redeeming mercy and saving love. For we shall then know, in a manner and in a measure we cannot know now, all that we owe to God in Christ: we shall read in the light of His face His wonders in nature and grace; truths that are at present mysterious shall be made plain; dealings that are at present unsearchable shall be cleared up; what is obscure shall be illuminated; what is contradictory reconciled. We shall be able to look with firm and unshrinking gaze into the deep things of God; redemption will give up its wonders; and the grace, and the sorrows, and the triumphs of the Cross will be revealed, and we shall grasp the breadth and length,

and height and depth of suffering and atoning love. Providence shall disclose its mysteries, and we shall understand how, amid much that was incomprehensible, much that to our finite vision seemed strange and contradictory, "the Judge of all the earth was doing right," and that all His appointments were distinguished by wisdom and goodness and truth. "Light is sown for the righteous." Knowledge of God and His purposes shall be full and perfect. Not that I think that truth shall be thoroughly comprehended at once, it shall always be pursued; through the long noon of the eternal day—the day that has no sunset—we shall ever be making fresh discoveries of the ways and workings of God, ever searching out His perfections; and as we advance further and further in knowledge—as some new view of the attributes of our Creator and Redeemer is opened up before us—there shall be fresh emotions of adoration in the heart, and new ascriptions of praise from the tongue. When, "standing on Mount Zion," we look back on all the way that God has led us, and see how many difficulties have been vanquished and temptations escaped, and dangers averted and enemies overcome, we shall

string our harps afresh, and casting our crowns before the throne, shall burst into song to Him "all whose ways we now acknowledge to be mercy and truth unto such as keep His covenant and His testimonies." Each saint among the ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousand of thousands, shall have his own especial song to raise, while every voice shall be in perfect harmony; and the chorus of thanksgiving, and the chant of adoration, shall float round the rainbow-encircled throne for ever, and its burden shall be, "Salvation to God and to the Lamb."

But, again, another element in the happiness of heaven is active service.

There will be rest there; but not the rest of indolence or inactivity, or of passive contemplation. The rest of God is full of work. The energy of divine power is never still, but is ever in action; creating, sustaining, upholding, moving with unwearied will among the suns and stars and systems which it called into being, that they might declare Jehovah's glory, and show forth His power. The rest of Christ is full of work—"My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." He is "overruling all things by the word of His power," watching over

the interests of His Church, controlling His enemies, curbing the malice of devils, appointing angels their commissions, and so superintending the plans and purposes of Providence and of grace, that the final issue shall be the glory of Him "who worketh all things after the counsel of His will. The Angels, are they not "flames of fire" in the service of God? "all ministering spirits sent forth to minister to them who shall be heirs of salvation?" So that heaven is not an idle place of dreamy repose. Rather is it a place of intense energy and activity, where all the faculties of the glorified soul and body shall be brought out in full play, and each have room and scope for the exercise of its perfected capacities and organs. "They rest not day nor night." "His servants serve Him, and see His face." And if the saints "rest there from their labours, their works do follow them." There will be pursuits and occupations suited to all tastes. There will be employments and ministries adapted to every mind. There will be variety in unity in heaven, and so far as our individual natural desires and preferences are sinless, they will be continued and be exercised for God's glory and our own happiness. There will be possibilities of service

there undreamt of here ; for no weariness shall ever exhaust the energies or overcome the strength of a nature that is equal to the angels. And the field of action shall be the vast universe of God, and the period of action the eternity that has no end. Work there shall never become toil, nor shall activity need repose.

Of the details of the service I cannot speak : they are not revealed in the sacred oracles. But I can imagine ministries of love to other worlds, or ministries of grace to the new earth ; and as volition will carry us from star to star, as the wish will there be as a wing to bear us to the place where we would be—the most distant even in the boundless universe—I can fancy the delight of waiting at the throne to receive from the lips of the Eternal the command which we are to execute, and, having received it, the pleasure of hastening forth to perform it, and when it is done, the joy of returning to tell that it is accomplished, and the ecstasy of hearing the words from the Master's lips, " Well done, good and faithful servant." This will be heaven ; services ever varied and ever new, noble work to be done, great achievements to be accomplished, lofty deeds that

throw into the shade the grandest of earth's doings, and all of them the expression of the heart's love, and all of them joyful to us and acceptable to God.

And what shall I more say of heaven? Brethren, perhaps to be silent and muse upon its glories would be best, for it is possible to "darken counsel by words without knowledge." And what, after all, can we say of the things which are not to be described? "For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, besides Thee, what He hath prepared for him that waiteth for Him." Every single mind has some conceptions of heaven peculiar to itself. For some it is the sinless world, where, pure in body and soul, and perfectly holy, they shall be "presented faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy," and "walk for ever with Christ in white, for they are worthy." For others it is the sorrowless world, where the "tears shall be wiped from all faces," and not a care shall cloud the brow or darken the soul, and the voice of crying shall be hushed, and "there shall be beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment

of praise for the spirit of heaviness." For others it is a world without death, where there shall be the renewal of human love and affections, and the lost shall be restored, and from whose happy circle no one shall ever be withdrawn, and "the solemn troops and sweet societies" of which shall be knit together in the closeness of an imperishable union. To others it is a world "without night," where "they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light, and they shall reign for ever and ever." These delight to think of heaven as a place where they shall gather in fresh stores of knowledge, and gain an insight into the wondrous works of God. Others, again, rejoice in the thought that they shall know God by means of a vision close and intimate; that they shall "see Him as He is," without a veil upon His glories, and be able steadily, and with eagle eye, to look upon the lustres of that face which is the life and the light of men. But whatever be the different conceptions of different minds, whatever of glorious beauty may be thrown by poetry over the house of many mansions, however bright the colours in which eloquence may paint the inheritance of the saints, whatever flights fancy may

take in the attempt to describe the surpassing glory of the world to come—it is beyond the power of imagination to conceive, or of words to describe, the blessedness of those who “stand on Mount Zion with the Lamb.” And when we have reached the world where Christ is crowned and throned, and where the beatific vision is ours, we shall stand in His presence in rapt and adoring admiration, and the words rising from the heart and thrilling from the lips shall be these, the words of Sheba’s queen to Solomon—“It was a true report that I heard in mine own land of Thy acts and of Thy wisdom; but, behold, the half was not told me: Thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame which I heard. Happy are Thy men, happy are these Thy servants which stand continually before Thee,” and that see Thy glory. “Blessing and honour, and glory and power be unto Him that sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.”

Brethren beloved in the Lord, may Mount Zion be one of “the Hills that bring us peace,” because it awakens in us longings and desires for the blessedness of heaven!

Oh why, with such a hope, should we ever forget

the home which is above? Why should the cares and sorrows and conflicts of time so depress and cast us down, seeing that we are heirs of so glorious inheritance? Why should we give such weight and importance to the riches and honours and pleasures of the world, when they are so poor and tarnished and worthless in comparison with the glory to be revealed at the coming of the Lord? Oh, "seeing that we look for such things, what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness?" "As risen with Christ, let us seek the things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God." As "our citizenship is in heaven," let our conversation be there too—our heart there, our treasure there; and, with the same concentration of purpose that distinguished St Paul, whose eye was ever on the goal, let us be able to say, "This one thing I do: forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forth unto those things that are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

So, living the life of heaven upon earth, it shall be no abrupt transition when, having fallen asleep in the arms of Jesus, we awake up in the land

where there is no night, no sin, or sorrow, or death—nothing but the light of perfect love, and the music of the new song, and the rapture of endless bliss. O glad awaking! O heaven of God! O vision of glory! There “they hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.”

O children of God! O heirs of grace! O pilgrims to Zion! As we muse and meditate on the inheritance of the saints, “the inheritance which is incorruptible, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you,” does not the fire burn, and are we not constrained to speak with our tongue, and say, “My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?” Is not the cry of our hearts something like this—“Oh that I had wings like a dove; for then would I flee away and be at rest!” Be patient; be ever pressing on; be ever looking up. Soon “the day will break, and the shadows flee away;” and the voice of your

Beloved, as He “cometh leaping upon the mountains, and skipping upon the hills,” will be heard calling you to come and “feed with Him among the lilies” of the paradise of God. And then, what then?

“Sin for ever left behind us,
Earthly visions cease to blind us,
Fleshly fetters cease to bind us;
Ah, 'tis heaven at last!

“On the jasper threshold standing,
Like a pilgrim safely landing,
See the strange, bright scene expanding!
Ah, 'tis heaven at last!

“What a city! what a glory!
Far beyond the brightest story
Of the ages old and hoary;
Ah, 'tis heaven at last!

“Not a teardrop ever falleth,
Not a pleasure ever palleth,
Song to song for ever calleth;
Ah, 'tis heaven at last!

“Christ himself the living splendour,
Christ the sunlight mild and tender,
Praises to the Lamb we render;
Ah, 'tis heaven at last!”

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